Sulfur 16

JAMES HILLMAN & CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
ON PSYCHOLOGY & POETRY

POETRY BY ANDREI CODRESCU, LYN HEJINIAN,
DIANE WAKOSKI, AND JUAN LARREA

THE CONCLUSION OF VLADIMIR HOLAN'S
A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

REVIEWS OF THE BLACKBURN COLLECTED, THE COMPLETE
WRITING OF LORINE NIEDECKER, AND THE HARVARD
BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

Clayton Eshleman

THE NAME ENCANYONED RIVER

Selected Poems 1960-1985

Introduction by Eliot Weinberger

The Name Encanyoned River is the author's selection of his best work. The translator of Vallejo, Artaud and Césaire, winner of the National Book Award, the editor of two seminal literary magazines, **Caterpillar** and **Sulfur**, Clayton Eshleman is a major presence in American poetry—an original and controversial writer.

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COVER: JOHN REGISTER
RED BOOTHS/Oil on canvas/46½ x 72 inches/1980

MARK KARLINS

EIGHT POEMS

In the dream of the glass cliff,
in the margins of nature my father
was a Siren. A very beautiful animal
in which so much human forgets itself
yet, even in its seductions, an anima.
I could hear him, in his defect, in his sweet animal voice
singing. And this contradiction of his nature,
the conjuring treachery he seemed,
song by song, to enjoy, between his two lips, was still a father voice,
a human song hatched from apocrypha,
that the human no longer lack the notion of the inhuman,
the mouth no longer lack an abyss.

Dear Comrade,

Because now my own mouth fulgurates demonically
sucked into the obscenity of all utopias, the street
a trench I
moving hourly deeper into anonymity

Paradise is a disease
that eats away the flesh

Comrade, in the public world of utopia,
in the labyrinth clamped at both ends,
life, under pressure, is quick to reverse.
The gestures, without bounds, become derelict.
Under pressure, comrade, under pressure,
dove strains into beak, finger into ash,
human into emphatic knowing. And eventually, comrade, surely,

because the mouth knows how to laugh,
a child falling thru the air
will pass beyond the realm of our hearing.

Like oracles
ignorant of their own nature

the gulls in their frenzy swing
low

Normality is counterfit.
The dream inhuman

appetital impulse to act

theater

in which a taste for crime, *all movement,*
Oedipal or otherwise,

arises from the scent
of another being.

GREYBEARD IN RING

The bride folds back to erotic fluid

That even psychology be devoured,

Greybeard, a creature in an early stage of development,
in the tent of a small travelling circus
a holy actor in clown suit
on the back of a docile bull.

Circus is an emphasis to restore,
an absorption
into the internal organs of an Elizabethan stripped down theater
of masks & gestures & signs

theater without a text

in which, from the sunken mouth of an Artaud,
an enormous dove crescendos

SAM SPADE EXCEEDS US HUMANLY

Large elms. Small street.
The reader sits on his porch
cloaked in itinerant rags.
Same scene. Same plot.
Same flirtatious woman,
subterranean dark virgin
in an ancient painting.

Large elms. Small eleven o'clock
nearing midnight. Small chest.
Small eye.

Same witness. Same thief. Same reader

& the darkness that opens one's history.

NARRATIVE

Long story speak
define us short,
indicate the luxury
of the thick mid-March snow.
Slow us
so that the unsubtleties
of the world are also
our work. Last week's odd air
too. A warmth. A red cardinal.
A naked warm branch
agreeable in the clement description.
Snow. The bird goes.
The red. (Woman is not a metaphor.) O rose,
you easy inaccurate image
accessible to address
dissuade me from the unthinking
structures & ends of my narratives,
gift me awake with doubt.

NAMING THE ANIMALS

In the deadest moment of a sentence
one learns to recognize his own face

as that of an animal pushed into a hecatomb.
With separation built into the body at birth,

with, at best, the gaze of an invisible narrator,
an 'I' anchored to his oblique tongue's meander.

Language is utterly extravagant
hollow of a carnivorous plant

into which animals crawl like drones.

Today I would like to unbed my fingers
inside a word
in which a thick fluidity of animals are vegetally entangled,

thrust two hands against the twelve annotated bones of my rib cage.
In radical erasure,
today I would like to allow my anatomy its definitive window,

like a bent utensil that resembles itself
today I would be astray in myself
oxidized in my somewhere without name.

The orphic spine of song.

In the myth of Adam,
there is a deeper myth fragments
after some unnameable disaster.

It was the fullness of his own death Adam, in his naming,
sought, the other

like a fine blue rain
on a naked skin

the terrestrial

in the fullness of its profound Eurydice.

The German traveller Leo Frobenius discovered
that the bark carving of an antlered man

was not a god creating the world
that the Escher-like stream of images
was not unfolding outward,
as he had at first suspected,
from the tips of his three fingers & mouth,
but that they (the animals) were entering,
in a word

like gods crossing strange borders
the animals

in the morning that breaks nature into parts

MASTERY IS THE POWER TO STOP WRITING (BLANCHOT)

My right hand is in love
with the unsayable letters
of a deity,

with the dampness
of human beings
in its clay,

& because of this
because my right hand raises my shoulders into the idea of a character
& is holding, in its black mouth, my nakedness without skin or bones

it is impossible, really,
in this solitude of a "he" for an "I,"
to stop writing.

My right hand is in love
with a walk that runs alongside the other,
a "he" in the censorial task of withdrawing from its "I,"

because of this
because my right hand raises a despotic shout
& is waiting, in its manufacture of well-armed blood,
in its lacework its gothic of bones,
for someone to intervene,

my left hand my left hand
will wake from its sleep,
saying Yes
will come to my right hand's aid.

ANDREI CODRESCU

THE OTHER END

ONE: A CAVALIER OFFER

Would you like history?
Would you like history to begin with you?
We're right on target here at
the exact junction of present and future
round and perfect for the erection
of a wall after the destruction of the world.
The next word I say is the future.
You just say the word
when I say so after you say to
so it instantly becomes past.
The last word I said was the past.
Not all past is historical tho.
Not if it leaves no trace
of writing, buildings, film –
lotsa stuff for Mr. Clean.
Push my vacuum pedal.
Some traces are self-consciously
historical but
we won't let *that* stop us.
The Arc de Triomphe
built for a specific victory
projects into the future
on loan to marching boots forever.
The specific blesses
its perverse flow future to past.
Its "meaning."
Something to do with Napoleon,
a person better known in psychiatry.
A new tribe, The Wannabees
have been hitting the streets:
we all wanna be You!
A church means its connections
with the past architectural One
but tends to become grotesque
when it's resolved in art

which is another reason why, love,
I don't hesitate to snuff the past.
The meanings of traces are
food for sentimentality:
Hitler's boy architect, Speer,
made it to "look good in ruins."
It looked pretty good in four years.
You just give the word:
everything can look that good!
A four-year millennium is a commentary
but not a millennium.
The creation of fake history
without meaning from the start
is a business now,
an Arc to commemorate the nonexistent,
i.e., the future,
flowing backwards into
conjured delirium,
to empty into the hyped-up present.
They *waste* the future.
Our activities, amour, legitimize!

SUPPOSE THIS CAME TO PASS.

It has.
In the East, history's remade.
In the West, erased.
On top of that
Big Words are coming back.
Ontology. Sport. Meaning. Millstone. Destiny. Deck.
The Debil. Der Gott. Life. File. Evolution. Mort.
Das Central Nervous System und Das Central Comitat.
Heavy-duty dudes *con* metashovels unearthing
Grand Cliches all ovah town
but mainly at the corner of Narcissus & Labyrinth,
a particularly, ugh, favorite psycho-intersection.
It's all this relativism, mahn,
bearing fruit & it ain't Fourier's pear.
Not mist, mysto-demagoguery.
Popular occult delusions
Speer-catch intellectual magma.
Another espresso please, easy on the *surfeit.*

NAMING SOME NAMES

One Gott-Debil runs this scene
goes by T.S.P.:
The Struggle for Power.
(So named by Andy
Schmookler, scholar without the tower)
Andy takes old Testament Gott & makes him
natural science, turns pater into matter,
good & ebil into one thing,
like before theology—
In Golden Gate Park by Tripping Tree
during the time everybody got direct hits
of Heaven!
We were there getting a whole lot.
(Write here a history of the hat
around whose rim we walked
to mirror the theme.)
But it's a long way from the Gott-days.
T.S.P. resides outside
I mean inside
the text outside of criticism.
And that's all the outside there is.
Everybody's otherwise inside
learning to claustrophobe.
Every generality calls for a bigger one
but the beginning's shrouded in paradox.
The koan, the parable, the Sufi tale,
the Zen umbrella commission
the combatants. Where
does one come by tales like that
in the days of bits and bytes?
The operational model for utopia
is only handicapped by the words I use.
The ravages wrought by time sought
the inside of a cool tavern
to wrestle a ouroborian beer snake,
infinite jaws, progressive traps,
horrible smoke, an incendiary jukebox.
Two more reasons he thought
why the Chosen People
write fundamentally upsetting books:
On the move they open to the
movement itself of ideas

since their raison d'être is a *promise*
they keep searching for the beginning,
re-establishing the ideatic chain
each and every time,
and they are ants on the vast body
of an Ocean-Text
all the romans-fleuves empty in.

THE SCHOLAR STORY

A gentleman scholar with a lit radish head
pulls up with all his earthly things
in the trunk of an old Volvo,
at a friend's who is not surprised
one evening in rainy november.
All his friends operate
the domestic machinery of time
just like the old car: sputter and die
on each others' doorstep
and then go in for repair and stay
tho some are now sleeping under bridges
because it isn't always OK.
The Scholar has 1) Kaypro portable,
2) sleeping bag, 3) balls of deco socks,
4) fear of dogs (so Dog stays outside),
5) pedophobia (so hush the kids),
6) toothbrush,
7) special 20th Century genius that announces
its place among the structures is unique
& untenanted although it knows
only the inside of the atomic umbrella
where it doesn't feel safe,
and the human housing it, a short one.

The world is an institution. In it there are
divisions. Within those, sections. Report
anywhere. Everywhere is not home. Voice-controlled
left, image-controlled right. Drugs
to the middle. Use for leverage those
whose grandmothers wrote verse
for the Yiddish papers
last century—
bridges with one end up in the air:
the world they go to has vanished

but the other end is planted in these sons
whose persons read:
we cannot regret any longer
a world we cannot live in,
i.e. pre-WW2 Europe.
Not monster-enough for huge gestures
but sufficiently in love with them
not to telephone.
We are waiting for the tone of the times to change.

Perhaps he isn't new but typical.
Intelligence, an appendix, residual,
or as in a book, useful,
self-endangered conspiracy,
solo center of toy-web,
dislikes women and children,
i.e. the powerless.
Tho he serenades them:

"I love the house I live in
with the creek running nearby
and the woman I live with.
Things are therefore good
especially with the trees
coming all out in flowers these days."
House, creek, woman, trees.
"But I can't work there
so here I creep."
The loner who goes crazy
if someone touches his car.
A new kind of guy, half tech,
half militant mason sent to set up
technofascist popcorn stands at the cross-
roads of Sentence & Reason.
We envy your ability to invent, he says.
Sure. And I'm the Pope.
Expressing regret for temporary
inability to control the poetic
sans products,
while looking no doubt
for some way to market it.

I immediately later change my mind.
He premeditates only the obvious.

I meet his mom
and his girlfriend Louisa-Marie.
There is tea, punch, petits fours, cake,
little sandwiches with the crust cut off,
and a fellow who plays the piano
even if you tell him to stop.
A Harvard PhD in nursing
recommends a feminist book on horses.
We are here to celebrate his book.
Everyone is friends of the good-natured nurse Louisa-Marie.
They take his entire stash of contributor's copies,
and only one of them asks him to sign it.
Everybody reads a line or two,
someone asks for a couple of words
explaining the thing.
He says,
"Skim it, you'll get the idea."
After that everyone goes on the porch
to look at Union Memorial Hospital
looming ahead in many-windowed splendor,
and everyone says how much they like Baltimore.

"Can I interest you in a Hassidic story?"

It appears that a rebbe in rags
passes by a rich man's house
and begs for a crust of bread.
The rich man sets his dogs on him.
A few years later,
the rebbe, grown wealthy,
passes by again, dressed in finery,
in a fine coach drawn by fat horses.
The rich man asks him in to be feasted.
When the soup comes,
the rebbe pours it on his clothes.
When the meat comes
he takes it to the stables
and feeds it to his horses.
Why? the rich man asks.
When I came here before,
the rebbe says,
I was still the same man
but you didn't feed me.
It is obvious that

you are not feeding the man
but the clothes
and the horses.

"Likewise, Harvard and I."

The many splendored windows of Union Memorial
are reflected in the proud face
of the nurse Louisa-Marie.
Behind them the sick converse with the beyond.

"The book is a revenge on father,
among other things.
I reinvent Evil as father,
then I kill him.
But I take no credit for it.
It came from elsewhere. It is
bigger than us."

The healthy PhD notes that the archers
on the cover are engaged
in a beautiful dance
though the dance is war.
By the Tree of Life
in Golden Gate Park –
"I saw beauty
in the universe
stretched about me
and containing me.
It was composed
of violent strife
of the rending
of flesh in history.
That was my Burning Bush,
does the Bible really say
that God didn't let Moses
into the Promised Land
because he broke the tablets,
or is that just speculation?"

The guy at the piano says it's in the Bible.

Moses,
another guy who

invented the father he set out to kill,
a more perfect father for the deed.

"I'll see to it that
the last humanist haha
is gone by dawn.
We create nothing:
T.S.P. makes certain
expressions & their by-products
inevitable.
I trace the demise thus:
Galileo shoves us out of the center of the universe.
Darwin out of the center of nature's world.
Freud out of fate's pilot seat.
Me, out of history.
Individual choice is the very thing
that takes *general* choice from us.
Individual choices create anarchy
and anarchy is ruled by T.S.P.
which infects the whole
with its imperatives."

It all comes down I say,
to another
deification of power,
a popular thing these days.

The scholar takes off his shoes.

"Opposition, if you're thinking it,
is only possible thorugh the creation
of *reasonable systems.*"

Fascism by any other name.
I mean, how much power
do you use to restrain power?
How do I get outside?
The world's been shrinking too much as it is.
They're taking down the outside as we speak.
The penis, a tough survivalist, alone holds the fort.
The soul wants to get out of the rain
like any pitiful bourgeois.
The proverbial They becomes It.
It is bigger than us and indifferent to us.

It pursues only its own aims
& the little in us that isn't It,
our so-called "humanity" is lost.

Never say
it says
it speaks
it talks
because it
does not

Of the whole grace
it can express only the part
that understands its own impotence.
To describe the working
of the outside in this here ah lingo
is to destroy el paradiso by the motion.
Oh thing where hast thou gone?
Language unweaves the world
it weaves when we give the spiel.
Without its gates of Jews,
el Paradiso stands unmoved
inside the humid critters
taking out the garbage only
to find themselves immersed
in the starbright riches of the azure flowing sea
where all at once everything that is *not you*
is THERE!
And then to get in a slow biz like this!

Only the garbage didn't get taken out.
It's still there,
it's too dark outside, hon.
We likes it in here
under the atomic umbrella
even as Something pushes us out,
we can do it tomorrow.
So we lie and lie ourselves open
to the devastation of divine indifference
—a redundancy—only to end up
reinventing morality,
the science of indoor living.

Which brings up a Question:

did God *really* give Moses the tablets?
Or did Moses carve them up there,
with a primitive tool,
knowing that the Burning Bush
didn't really give a damn—
being neither Good nor Bad
nor Concerned—
but that if he wanted his people to survive,
he had better come up with something quick.
And when he did
God the Bush *did* get pissed off,
and fixed it so that Moses
would never get home.
Does *anything* give a damn?

'T.S.P. gives a damn
about what serves It.
It is not served by morality.
Moses invented an aberration:
he rose against T.S.P.
Morality is a system of natural value.
Natural value is based on biological selection.
What is selected is good
because it is what works.
The body is good
because it is the best nature has
come up with.
We must defend
the integrity
of our organism
by means of morality.
But in Civilization
we confuse
the aims of
Power
with the aims of our integrity.
But the two differ.
In the undifferentiated,
amoral primal It
we had no choice.
But in Civilization
we do not share nature's purpose,
so we must split It consciously
into good It and Bad It.

We have to invent
a conscious Manichaeism
on the basis of what's good for us.
But since too often what is good
for us
is not good
for the rest of this world,
which has in it also birds
and trees and seabeds,
we must apply morality both inward
as a kind of brakes
and as a weapon against
the objective power of It.
We have to perform
the same operation as Moses:
transform
divine indifference
into benevolence."

But the Good we bend to our purposes
is weakened,
while the Bad grows stronger.
(It's the only game in town.)
So Moses helps us along
the path to destruction.
Realising this, he committed suicide.
It wasn't God
kept him out of Paradise:
Moses didn't want to go there
because he knew
it was a made-up place.
Moses didn't want
to see his metaphor
come to life,
didn't want to live in his
invention. He had rent asunder
the sacred energy,
just as we split the atom.
He must have thought that by refusing
to authorize his fiction,
he could put divinity back together.
His suicide was an attempt
at synthesis
by removing the author

from the work.
Too late.
The split atoms don't unsplit.
Differentiation is evolution.
The demiurgic is destructive:
the universe it creates
destroys the universe it describes.
The word is chemical.
Reason and Poesy.
Containment and Escape.

FRANCHISING THE FIGHT

The only way to fight
is to open up franchises
hoping that the thing
released somehow
from centrality
includes but does not limit
the body it defends.
Reason,
humanity's collective building,
perhaps the edifice
of culture itself,
isn't very old
and is rather puny
when inspired babble rises.
Revelation
and prophecy,
unreasonable speech,
synergistic and viable
disintegrates the sacred It,
deconstructs itself
obliquely even as it follows
an almost mathematical morality.
A "scientific" poetics
and a "poetic" law.
"Mechanization" and "objectification"
are fully present
in the language of the lamentations.
Fighting common sense
one arrives in the City of God.
This fight causes the Debil-God to come.
Debil looks like an assistant professor.

The text has certain therapeutic effects.
The thinking that it encourages is palliative.
It is tonic and absorbing and keeps us awake.
It makes staying up a pleasure.
The indifference
of power accounts
for the failure of generation
after generation
to bring about peace.
We feel most utopian
and least articulate
under the umbrellas
made from Ebil itself.
Words are only tenuously
connected with sense.
We must cultivate this tenuousness
as if it were the whole territory.
The tragicomedy of utterance
is that we all trample
the same narrow isthmus
between word and world.
The L in the belly of the word
is the Khyber Pass,
the center
of ambition.
Its conquerors control
the back and forth.
The power now controlling
the traffic between
reality and symbols
is journalism.
When poetry was in charge we
saw more reality, more world.
Now we see more symbols, more
words. Some of us stand
in the middle of the traffic
screaming: THERE IS NO BRIDGE!
(And in the Bay Area too!)
The bridge groans, barely capable
of handling the weight.
(The Trampled Isthmus)
The bridge is a body,
an Exquisite Corpse
formed by the former guard

who cannot die.
By offering the golemic corpse
of a literary corpse instead,
they hope to separate
literature from physiology.
The inability to separate them is
what we die from.
When their Exquisite Corpse dies,
the gods will
take the bridge with them the way
they would have taken all of us
if we hadn't made them this.
What's more, they will enjoy
it better: less of a mess.
We interpose
a memorable body between
their murderous desires
and their sentimentality.
Graffiti on the bridge:
Hormones + Experience = Reality.
Even so, downhome narration
rarely fails thought,
tho thorgasm eludes our poets.
We've got to hit us with the Tertium Organum.
It is our good fortune to possess
the key to inspiration
in that yonder cabinet
and our misfortune to be forced
to intention. Fortunately
our intentions are (not) good. Had
they been (not) bad we'd be tense.
We sit on the cyclone
fence, dangle feet over the gene-
rators below. Sitting on the fence
used to be a simple affair. A country
sort of thing with a straw twixt
teeth. Anxiety's industrial now.
Nero's neon had he had it
would have been hard core. At
the core of his madness lay neon.
All bright future things lie
at the upset cores of the insane.
The upset cores of the insane
are generators. Their humming

turns the engine of history.
Our sweet predilections and love
connections feed it juice.
Our shells feed it oil. When it gets
enough intention
it runs smooth. But when a core lights
up without the yoke of sense
it trembles, sputters, chokes.
Ah, misery inspired by pure rant!
We equate adventure
with violence, mistaking
the jukebox cores of the insane
with the ordering of goats and sheep
on a statistical hillside.
Reason is bricks, we said,
on them we build the reasonable
edifice of science.
We eat the use.
The poet on the other hand waves
doubting hand in dead air,
sunbathes on the roof or, worse, jumps.
The engine of history does not
hide in the brick edifice of science.
Nor does the house of bricks hide
inside the engine. Nor is
the house the engine or vice
versa. When faced with in-
compatible metaphors science
calls poesy on the race phone:
cortex to cortex.
I will not help you, says poesy,
until you get these bricks out of the way.
I can't see the sky.
So philosophy clears le debris.
And this engine, poesy says, hums too loud,
it disturbs my reverie.
Science shuts off the engine
with a communist potion from his kit.
Great silence falls between the metaphors.
The sky is a perfect picture of the past.
The silence the perfect future.
In the present tense we the tense
wait for something to say itself.
Philosophy holds its vial frozen

at the exact moment of its use. Nothing
budges. The universe is present. An insane
core lights up. The engine coughs, it
starts, it sputters. The dinosaurs come
out of the books. The mechanic, a Mr.
Nietzsche, wipes his forehead with a greasy
rag. A Monsieur Pasteur,
vows that the engine will not move. He
hastily begins to pile bricks in front
of it. NO PASSERAN, he shouts! A wall
of reason stands before the thief
and his demented motor! The unexpected
and the shady have done the job.
Eternally the honest sucker is thwarted
by the cunning of these two. Eternally
he vows to set things straight. Next
time he's taken worse. And always
there is more blood on the floor and more
psychology. The bricks are books,
the tower has a million floors.
It falls inevitably down
between irreconcilable metaphors.

Meanwhile at the party
merely a rose away
Union Memorial in the Exxon-lit night
was still—
we could heard the flowing of the river Styx
Sighing under the wordrain that beat on it.
Afraid of nothing but of leeches
we cannot practice what it preaches.

Three days later Scholar left for the creek,
the woman & the flowering bougainvillea
leaving behind only his word-mantilla.
The anxious telephone burst several times:
"Is my book merely a book?"
It's as great as The Origin of the Species,
his friend said.
To himself: a book is a book.

TO DEPLANE

To deplane, to exit
from this casual music of drinking air
(I just typed it *drjinking*, pidgin Dutch,
but I have not been, have not)
to leave this now would engender a sadness
bigger than the stain on the tarmac. My business
is to live, and in this living push
forward from the self's endogment,
its chainlink to plywood in the crabgrass sideyard,
not a fake,
not an engine,
not a star.
No, take this thing up again, up
from the shimmying of ancestral wagons,
alluvial mud, the herd animal cotillions,
from the metronome mob-waltz on listless floors.
Up from subtrahend and minuend, from less and more.
Take it up from the waiting in nested rooms.
Drag I-double from I-double
to the ancient door.
My place
is with the svelte
and silver plane,
a thought directly from Apollo's forehead
into Dionysus' side
written into these remnants of thin air
last flappings of a passing July.

CHOSEN

The bagmen of the droning noise
those creatures of the pension plan
dropped numbers in their neutered eyes
and clucked their tongues as I passed by

whose homeless head, unpillowed, raised
The Headdress of Lone Eagle's Nest
a once-proud thing in clotted snot
where blue-black botflies shone like gems

that rustled in an ice-pick wind
—it found my heart, that meaty cave.
Yet I had no taste for regret.
I curled up sleeping with my dick

whose fangs were sunk into my neck
who bled me in that desert place
where televisions sang of love
and schoolgirl circles dotted i's.

CRAWLER

Who was he? A dog
up on hind legs, strutting
in soiled pajama top.
Bottomless, scratching hisself,
smoking stale OTB-class cigar.
Said he was my reason and my soul,
my bookie, my confessor.
Ran the pee-wee Grand Guignol
between bed and dresser.
The flap around this dude.
You'd think he wassa, what,
Roman emperor in some movie.
The bullshit artist's artist
as 3-time loser.

Don't tell him
how I iced him
once in a dream

woke up to see
his breathing expressive-even-in-sleep face
a mild accusation on the pillow.

Don't say
we could have called each other out from the key of dead
except we choked, froze
by the racks of whitebread in a 7/11,
bought into lotteries, suckled chump heavens.
Played out the rest as double solitaire. Dun-colored days.
Sidestreet living. Dostoevski's poor.

Where is he? tonight?
Somewhere
out in the cold
or holed up with Ma Banshee behind railroad flat doors
(she's whispering in his ear: *it's all yours, sugar*
let's joypop
the smell of the score.) Smell:

pissy diapers, boiled cabbage, hair in the drains. Yo. Sure.

I might even cross the street to see him.
We could go another round
except we won't.

CRIB IN THE ROCK

nothing comes; outside
the slush-spread parking lot
is pocked by rain . cold,
knocking of pipes .
the fridge hums . the days,
once stacked, now run
all together threaded
by the birds who fly
through them
and the slipping sun
. what we want
is neither deliverance from
nor endless falling in . the burden
is to have passed the perfection of trees
and yet fall short of angels . it is this
felt-gap we'd cure
with all the noisy ardor
of high exertion, or learn
to take up silence, finding
the crib in the rock, meshing
our cars into the streams of traffic
garlanding the broad earth:
an earthly peace at last
terrestrial union card at last
. dog
barks; furnace clicks and fires up .
outside on the parking lot
a someone coughs
"Who said?"
"He wants some."
"Not Doc's."
. and thus and so
and thus and so
lifetimes pass
and the big rock candy cathedrals
rise up shining
or do not

TOOTH OF BLOND

A new alphabet.
The consonants
are everyday objects:
cups and saucers, twigs, bars of soap.
For vowels the distant
yowls of a coyote.
With this we manufacture
the name inside your name.
Or—what—did you think you were

immune?
Ja. Nein. Vielleicht.
Until you felt
the tooth of blond.
Until the wider brooding
came to separate your fibers
into the hour's tall voices
each talking its facet
in the depths of smoked mirrors
where one could rummage to find whatever in oneself
might match the dedication in policework. We sensed

in the photographs
undertones of chartreuse-green fluorescence
radioactive
washed through mezzotints of bone antiquity.
We tasted
its tincture in the gutter ales of Kreuzberg,
the juice of laundry, preserved
as a memory of high country windows,
a midsummer's day, through which
lake breezes had taken
the smell of new-mown hay and
the feeling called "no bottom" and

lately this drifting on the kingsize bed.
You call it "all I am" "the constant prince"
have become the daylight's passenger
and the nighttrain's expression
a bolder nephew now, a
rider on through off and on, a
tourist of the real.

THE BALL

Nothing, not even a French supertrain
can expedite this destiny now.

Each body only seems to hesitate
before falling facedown into history

and the altered music (rank calliope)
swells up around them all.

Don't say "beautiful"
because even "necessary"

would put too much spin
on the ball that bounces

along the tops of sentences
through Palladian arches

and out the frame.
The frame is folded

and fed into the flames.
Their enormous shadows play

as the colossal Punch-and-Judy
drama of the multiplied

individual soul
left to gnaw its own vitals

when its utopias turn kakashit
and Arctic night bores down.

Redemption? It's in view
from the attic window:

white petals
scattered on the ground

ungathered
in Kansas or Komi.

POEM

Life is like a bobsled run.
Down you go! and then it's done.

Were you frightened? Were you high?
Did the blurry stuff whizz by?

Did you wiggle? Were you still?
Were you with me on the hill?

Did you hit a patch of bad?
Or was it mostly smooth and glad?

Whoopsie daisy, sugar bun.
Down you go! and then it's done.

JAMES GAVER

TWO POEMS

IT JUST SO HAPPENS

Call it a dream. It does not change anything.
Wittgenstein

To tell you the truth, I haven't been sleeping well.
I fall asleep, but I don't sleep. I'm only asleep.
The fire dies, the room grows colder, and when I awake
I am only awake.
When I'm not sleeping, that's just how it is with me.
It can always be another way, but then it's only another way.
What keeps us all awake, if only because we think it does,
Is passing the long night thinking only
That we think it does, or thinking
Something else, and having it just be something else.
You lie in the twisted sheets, perceiving yourself as being there.
You listen for a time to the clock, and think of it as a clock.
You feel a mild sense of fear, if only because you do so,
Because your fear is somehow as such, and this in itself
Makes you fearful; it seems to be frightening you twice,
Once when it does, and then again when it does.
When you feel frightened, it happens that you do so.
You can always feel otherwise, but then that just happens too.
The fire that thinks you to sleep, on the warm bed of its ashes,
Staring in on its frightening self, with the same eyes
It goes out in, could always be thought of as causing
The dark thing that it comes to, but when that's
What things come to, it just so happens that they do.
When I can't get to sleep, the truth is I'm not sleeping.
It could always be a dream, but that would only be the truth.
If I'm awake, and I am awake, then that's what the case is;
I'm just afraid, as I lie here, that it only happens to be true.

NO ONE FEELS LIKE I DO

Don't think life is like this. Don't think like I do.
Those who suffer, after all, are often those who suffer
In spite of themselves. They feel pain because they do so.
Some feel an ache that is more than just an ache they feel.
Others start to hurt because something has started to hurt.
There Are forms of pain that aren't Just
A Form of Pain, that don't feel like this,
Which only feels like this.
Feeling the way I do, I alone can be said to feel this.
I could share it with the others, but I'm afraid they'd feel it too.
The ache that I feel within, which is only the ache
To feel within, is the one thing
That I need, it's a way of being
Alone with myself, so don't nod your head
When I tell you about
The way it feels; when I nod my head,
I feel only a nodding head.
The burden I bear myself, which doesn't prove
I can bear myself, is a dead weight
To be sure, it's a way of being
The load that I bear, so don't lift me up
Like a thing that weighs
As much as itself; when I feel the weight,
I have only the feeling of weight.
When I look you in the eye, I have the feeling your eye is looked at.
When I listen to what is said, there is a sense of something said.
When I think of myself alone, and I take your hand
In the hand I'm alone with, don't squeeze back
As though something you feel
Could pass between us; if your touch is a sign,
I feel only the touch of a sign.
When the last feeling dies, I plan to be there as it does so.
I know I'll feel better, I just won't know that I do.
Those who differ, after all, are all the same in feeling different.
No one feels like I do, because I don't feel like I do.

THREE POEMS

SELF-PORTRAIT

to speak about oneself
is often just an accident.
it is a brutal accident.
both vehicles are completely demolished:
both the blue pontiac
(which symbolizes the perceivable universe)
and the black or white pickup truck
(which symbolizes the
mechanism of perception).

i start out with the whole world photographed in my head,
and soon enough photography becomes obsolete.
then—
diagrammed within the heart's unbroken tendrils,
there appears a series of flames, followed by an explosion,
followed by one brief moment of love.
the Captain lies panting somewhere near the entrance to the spine,
his jacket (made of some unidentifiable Grey-Matter) is torn
and stained by huge bloody cave-paintings.
day follows night follows day follows night.

i end up with the whole world photographed in my head
and the Captain cradled in my arms,
beseeching to be treated as a child (a lost child) (a frightened child)

and all the while he is secretly raking in the dough.

CHILDREN'S STORY

it's a story for children:
one morning, god puts his clothes on backwards.
which is why we have thunder, boys and girls.
which is why we have great empty cider barrels
rolling overhead—rolling, rolling, rolling across the
tops of our skulls, boys and girls,
and crushing us with the weight of an entire
unnameable universe.

and the thickness of the skin, boys and girls,
is the creator's way of relaxing on a sunday afternoon,
in front of the television set,
in front of the baseball diamond on the television set,
while his wife is busy in the kitchen baking cookies
(baking gingerbread men).

a child in the back of the classroom raises her hand
and asks, "what is blood?".

blood, boys and girls, is nature's way of saying
have a nice swim,
but don't go out too far,
don't go out over your head,
over your head where you might get flattened
by one of god's early morning barrels rolling backward across the sky.

"the blue sky?" asks the young girl.

"yes. the blue sky."

THE TIP OF THE TONGUE

something can always be said.
of a tree, we say that it opens like the end of a long wet tunnel.
of an empty room, we attempt to say nothing, and then
(at the last minute) a synonym for ripe fruit
is found undressing on the tip of the tongue.
of an apple, we say that it has the courage of slogans.

a sip of bread is a fine example
of the plastic found deep inside the lungs:
the mother of invention is nodding her head in agreement,
her hands busy with birds nails and hammers.
she is, actually, sad today.
and a small creature stands before the human membrane
and pounds upon it at regular intervals: like a bass drum
it vibrates with a resounding thunder
and never splits
or shatters.

the human membrane is intact,
and yet a sheet of paper can tear its own heart to bits
and all because language is an ineffective court of law
in which we all gather round in brotherhood
to watch our favorite failures of principle.

of the house in which we live, we say that it revolves in time
to the music.
of a glass of vodka, we say that it has borrowed an extraordinary
story.
of speech, we can say that it proceeds—
and i've never seen rhyme laugh so hard or so long.

WILLIAM CORBETT

EAST MAUCH CHUNK—JIM THORPE

"Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all"
—Walt Whitman

GOING TO JIM THORPE

Watch your footing down the iron steps . . . they ring
. . . Steam . . . A hug then other arms lift you up . . .
Single thread tracks into the East Mauch Chunk
station . . . Torn down . . . And rusting silent six
tracks on the Mauch Chunk side once carried freight for
the New York Central . . . Begin again . . . Pass the one storey
joined company houses Palmerton zinc mill smokey towers
and over the twisting cement highway cut into hill's side . . .
Field of junked cars . . . Trout hatchery billboard . . . Lehighton
. . . Begin again . . . Coming down Mansion House hill Bear
Mountain on the right . . . Curve descending until the town
hidden, infolded by two hills begins just after
you remember it did, bares itself and begins
low brick Eagles Club and on to Courthouse Square
up the hill road cut by steel into rockface where water
seeps and ice cascades and there are the postered
faces of men who ran for Sheriff, County Assessor, Probate
Judge and cross the bridge's booming wood planks . . .
That bridge is no more yet the Lehigh runs wide,
shallow and the color of coal dust . . . And climb the hill
up Center Street street of red clay and cinders . . . Stop
by the hugely knotted tree trunk
To go and stay with men and women
who do not drive and have never been further
by train than Wilkes-Barre or Allentown or
Philadelphia for a ball game or farther still
once for a funeral, the sister's husband whose house
they couldn't force themselves to eat in so filthy
were her plates and cups . . .
To see the carp slow orange and gold ingots
feathery drift in the silk mill pool . . .

Movie theatre seats at Browns arranged facing
a TV screen to watch the Puddin'head-Granny-Ashburn-
Robin Roberts Phillies Whiz Kids play and the A's
managed by stringy ancient Connie Mack dressed
in high collar and street clothes . . . To hit
a triple over third base the ball rolling into
shrub and dark woods deer came from to browse
goldenrod as they came evenings to the edge of fields
beyond town . . . You drove there with the One Armed Fella,
Milt the Barber, the Young Fella whose car had no
floorboards and you counted the brown and tawny deer
before he leaned on the horn and they bounded
once then twice . . . White handkerchief of their tails
into the woods . . .
Men who loved deer hunting, high school football,
Legion baseball played as they had played by their sons
so that one day Buck Rader set out by bus to play Class D
with the Yankees, the Hose House slot machines,
beer and pickled hardboiled eggs turned purple . . .
Men who lost an arm or leg or fingers coupling cars
for the railroad . . . X who lost his eye hunting
and had the socket sewn closed with a cicatrix
Men who go for pleasure summer evenings
to the tables of the Jolly Men's club
in a forest clearing and the smoke from their cigars
is blue above their heads . . . And their wives
who talk in the dark on their front porches
waiting for their men to return from trout
fishing or huckleberry picking, who wear
white gloves when shopping overtown, who scrub
their front steps every good day of the year,
who gossip over bridge, who play bingo
Saturdays at "Bingo Pat" O'Briens,
who cakewalk under the fire of torches,
who wear aprons over their housedresses,
who carry grudges, who bury husbands,
whose children move away and send their sons
and daughters to spend the summer
who are here with their men as a child saw them
sees them still like cut-outs against the sky
like the bad men carved on the tombstone
eyes among leaves and smoking gun barrel snout
that brought down the good judge
falling dead on the stone . . . Molly McGuries black hand

jail house wall . . . Fish sent to Chicago in the mailbags . . .
Digger the Undertaker four quarts today . . . Baby skeletons
buried under the nunnery that stood on Center Street
Hopalong who masturbated on park benches
Sep who wasn't right in the head
Crumb and Donnie and Paulie who should have
stayed in the Navy and he'd be retired now
and the Bevans boy who went off into the woods
and just shot himself and the "Roundheaded" Irish,
the Hunkies, Polacks, Dutchboys and thick skulled krauts . . .
Going back to Jim Thorpe where he who never
set foot in the town, whose bones were disturbed
from somewhere in California and brought here
to a red sandstone tomb cracked one night by someone
with a hammer, his medals somewhere else,
no cancer hospital, no light industry, no nickel
a week from the Eagles . . . A handbag factory . . .
Going back the hills that begin the Poconos
are a bowl and a black storm paw claps
over them, Asa Packer mansion, Four Presidents
visited passing through and the railroad
switchback was sold to the Japs just before
World War II, the 4,000 who worked
on the railroad down to four . . . Going back
the hand shapes mind's flickers
the mind keeps what the eye saw
enlarged and this past is most present
the now of which they would deny each part . . . Seen as a child
their flag new washed sheets
and pillowcases clean white their color . . .
Taste the springwater and tin cup's
icy lip . . . sleep on ironed sheets . . . Hear the winter's
coal rattle, Junkman sing out "Rags and Old Iron,"
"Rags and Old Iron" and his stout horse's iron hooves
and the night's scratchy park loudspeakers Frank Sinatra
"I'll see you in my dreams" . . . Going back
the conductor cries out "Naz-ar-ath
Bath, Don't Forget Your Pack-age-as"
gather up the things that are yours
as they are gathered up in you

THE WELL

Let the bucket down
let what fills it fill it to the lip
what slops over slop over
and be lost on this draw
and be there when the bucket is let down again.
Let the hard earth cellar floor be there
Caroline Harder, the Mummey brothers, Tommy McArdle,
Pippi Rader, the hairless babyman dealing "Authors."
Let the snap purse, leather purse worn
on the baker's belt be there
it is and has been since he made change,
careful with his coins, for puffy powdered
jelly doughnuts that sparkling leafy afternoon.
Let the red Schwinn bike be there
let the red stone spit on one side
tossed high wet or dry be there
Butchy Eichhorn, Harry the lefthander,
Connie "Beans," the dry ice cellar
where beer and soda are stacked in crates
be there as trapped inside the fear never leaves
let the names come up
what sign of them remains, faces lost
Ricky Rawn too beside me in the wagon
black Eton suit and cap. Black Jiggs scottie dog.
Let the house in ruins above
Brady's Lake . . . No, it appears
a print with moon, a movie still.
Let the right-step, left-step stop cakewalk
hold its breath at the arrow clear from dark
torches make darker, blaze deeper
and torches above the fur hatted head
of Ethan Allen be there as he boldly knocks
on Fort Ticonderoga's door
as he knocked and the commandant answers
in his nightshirt holding a candle
up to the handsome steel engraved faces.
Draw the bucket up with image pure
and stripped by time, by memory worn down
to essence, to witness, mirror smokey
blue ropey laurel leaf cigar smoke
and cough and swearing bad words song
"In for stealing Lehigh Valley coal

where bedbugs play shimmy round my hole."
Grape arbor lattice makes shadow
of sunlight . . . Penn Lake shallows crooked wavelets . . .
vegetable hawker's tin scoop scale . . .
What ARE these things and names in me?
The strike and pull of a catfish
horned and black deep in the dark.
The slimy cream catfish underside.
Pick and shovel clinks, miners under
Landsford streets. How deep are they?
Little Green Riding Hood let the bucket down
once to brain or heart's depth
the stream it seeks runs unceasingly
nothing then was pure as now it comes
to light, comes free from the mess of days
sudden as the deer, buck or doe, leapt
over the car's hood at Bear Run
where we visited the lake of stones
if it comes to light
if it is dark there at all
let the bucket down.

SATURDAY EVENING POST COVERS

Peagreen backed books
locked in glass cabinets.
The man of the house died
without having laid a fire
ever in his livingroom hearth.
so much mess it would make.
Winter mornings they carried ash
from furnace to backyard garden
where the green bell peppers
she was pleased to call "mangoes" grew.
He went overtown to work
forty years in the post office
sending for fun a few
dead fish in the Chicago bags.
She swept and cleaned the porch

and everything then wore gloves
down to the A&P. Pork
for the sauerkraut. Dutch Cleanser.
Soap to unwrap and store
the bars to keep longer.

HOUSE DEVIL STREET ANGEL

Who sat on the curb
who took up nuggets
babies of cooling fresh tar
who daintily picked sand away
and who put the moist tar lumps
in his mouth chewing, smiling, chewing
until his grandmother ran from the house
to drag him away
sticky, triumphant, blackened clean clothes
who they brought home in a wheelbarrow drunk

PIG

After dinner the cards
dealt around the Schlect's
kitchen table. Paulie, me
Carl, Joanie, Shortcake
and in the center
on an oilcloth flower
the spoon is placed.
The trick is
to hold the hand
that lets you grab
the spoon and never
give away your reach
by so much as
a sound or twitch
God forbid a grin!

1948

There were no jews murdered
in Northeastern Pennsylvania towns
they knew but two or three
and those they knew had horns.
But old man Smith made a black man
piss outback in his field.
He stopped for gas at Smith's Grove
was so tall he spoke over the car
wouldn't have been on the road
to Lake Harmony in the first place
had he been other than Goose Tatum
driving a car full of Globetrotters
lost no doubt when he bought gas
and asked for the bathroom. Smith said no.
You just go around back, use the field.

LITTLE BROCKER GROWS UP

He wants no more rutching around
to sit still, cup of tea in hand
his dog asleep in the sun at his feet.
This simple and simpler he wants
to be somewhere else. But he cannot
be where he was what he was.
A pail full of huckleberries
to sort through throwing aside stems,
twigs, leaves and red unripe ones.
Big Brocker knew where the bushes grew
so high you stood stretching to reach
the berry clusters and the boat rocked.
He turned away from the nurse's
offer of water and sighed. When she
bent to check he was dead. Like that.
The way he hoped and wife agreed
to go that painless way is best.
This simple and simplest Little Brocker
wants a place where memory cannot follow,

daresen't he almost said, or will not insist
images without reason. No tar in the bubblegum.
No Palmerton butcher's window, no grandfather's snore
to bring him to grief. A place that
will silence "Tasteecake, brogans, on the dole,
stocked trout, Frank Hoenig" or let these
not be the same dull world returning
breath to the mirror. Hold the mirror closer.
Who will hear them as he heard them?
See as he saw? Who will know?
When will feeling touch bottom?

SPRINGWATER

Not three or four steps
off the blacktop to Lake Harmony
the spring we stop to drink from
dipping the tin common cup.
Christ, water that cold
you wait, hold still
or risk a headache.
There are stars in it
and deeps beyond deep
where no German browns
no rainbow trout swim.
Plunge in your arm
there is no human feeling.
A screen of brush held aside
there is a clearing
grass grows up to stone
built lip. We kneel and dip,
each one of us, the cup.

FIRST POEM

"The gray sky sets on the gray hills
The town living out its death"

Whose voiceprint in mind's ear?
So long there now no way to know,
to tell it from my own.
Dusk. Late August. Alone.
Thirteen when passing the park swings
these words in lines came to me
and obeying their law I wrote down
what I heard hearing it then
seeing it, the very physical things.
As ignorant as innocent, glad, solemn,
proud and eager to please
as nonchalant as anything ever done.
Thirty years and this seems a wide field
furrows and a wind, its edge
that ditch that ran behind the swings.
What a thing to begin with, an elegy.

EAST MAUCH CHUNK

East Bear Mountain
I come again
the past will rise
he steps from the train in Navy whites
this man, my father after four years
I'm told I cried.
I come again
and the past will meet me
where North Street becomes
state highway under the keystone sign
and Jim Thorpe Oklahoma Sauk-Fox
of Carlisle College is buried
and not one other promise
made in the Hotel American kept.
I am here again
this man walking up Center Street's
steep hill come from Milt's barbershop
who latches the back gate
crosses the alley towel over shoulder
soap in hand to shower upstairs

past the pool table in the Hose house
and return wet haired, refreshed, free to do so.
These phantoms in new equation
yet sing-song accents native to me
that I might know.
Thorpe's Summit Hill wife it was sold
the town on his name to revive
what the railroads left, the Switzerland of America,
huge gloomy high raftered stations
empty and the men driving
to New York and further working construction.
This dead man stripped of trophies,
medals in Sweden: this man ruined
for one season of semi-pro ball
they took in desperation for their own
whom he had never laid eyes on
who they knew only as a meal ticket
so their own, their young might stay
they gave their name for him and a tomb.
I come here after my own
speechroot, my home in me, those who
attend with their part, who witness
and address, those who leave yet stay
who do not forget, who are my tribe,
my jews even as they were Babel's
even as he mounted and rode away
I come again.

THE MARVEL

Albert, frère, took his hard lessons from God, père, a dark dirty God full of tricks and rumination, a spit always running down his chin, dropping on his brown lap where he held his maps, or Albert there on the knee with a toy or yellow hat. Albert was crying; there was a tear on the hat like a burn spot and God took his large ugly finger and wiped the tear off the hat, showed his finger to Albert, see. Albert was thinking about flowers, about the nocturne, about water pipes underground in winter cities and his mama, Tille, a woman of space and Easter feathers rolled up in a drawer. God could easily read his thoughts, could rifle through them, but didn't, had his own thoughts, still as standing water in an old rain barrel or in a dried up birdbath. His thoughts, though, as thoughts will, tangled with Albert's. Four things: all these are mine, all these flowers and the summer carousel behind them; you, Albert, may have one or maybe two for a thought or dream; the nocturne is my pleasure, my own wall of solitude, the thing I bring to myself as a gift from lighted light and the sticks of potted earth, my boredom; night is my nocturne's fancy, my play poem. These, he went on in his shiny voice, a stream of melody hooked to a harmony played by light spirits, celestials, water pipes under cities in the long dream of winter, say, he said, in Sweden, my Albert, are breathings, the way I have made my water float through cities and yet the cities drying their tears when I close my fist like this (Albert started and the toy fell off his lap, broke blue, red) and the ice shatters and thousands of things swirling, Albert dear, and running fast down the drain. God interrupted himself, his lively streaming voice, and reached for the toy, arlequin, and kissed its wound and held it for Albert to kiss. We'll find it, he said, him, a graveyard and have our friend, the monks, and your mother lay a thick earth blanket of psalms and fifty strong lamentations, I can do what I want, see. And, your mama, the mother of Albert, Albert mère, I know her and I've pushed a finger, this one or this one, through her thin head and touched those thoughts she has, all green and upright, my ability to do so, sir, and she takes the dead thoughts I've touched with this finger or this, and curls them in the drawer of feathers, for you, dear, for your maturity.

II

Albert, in his fineness and his wrinkled pants and doublet, slid off God's knee to the floor and skittered away on child's legs to inquire of his mother, Tille, there in her room, packing and unpacking for the journey she would make soon to Hell, for he would make her, mère, queen of Hell for it needed a queen, all those yelling spoiling devils and the troublemaker, bowling day and night, dashing from corner to corner, peeing and cursing, scraping their elbows and sticking fingers in their eyes. She packed her hats, her feathers, and the dry things under the bed, and Albert climbed up on the bed. They knew they could be seen, if he, somewhere, wanted to see. Still they lingered in each other's eyes, and thought there. Goodbye Mother dear, formal mother. He pressed something at her, a hat. She put the hat on; the devils would not recognize it as a hat from God's house, rather an unknown hat, a quiet spectacle so yellow and pure with a flat childish shape, and Albert off again and a little tilted to find his father and rest.

III

Mère gazed into the tilted mirror and saw the devils laughing, each of them a soft yellow hat, but taking her valise and her letter—a few short strokes of an eglantine pen by God: Dear The World of Hell and Distinguished First Servant—she slid into the mirror of mirrored yellow hats and made her funny way to a new room of hell, the room for the queen, with something of heaven in it, herself, and then abided with some peering through the windows and lifting the fringe of the bedcover, scraping across the floor and coiling round the old-fashioned silken pullcord hanging from the ceiling.

IV

Now, God whispered in a leathery voice into the small ear of Albert, frère, you have no mother but me, she has no son but those, and multiplying every hellish second into a million more shattered devils or smalls. This is an accomplishment of mine, agreed?

V

There was a tea party for the devils. They put a tent up of green and yellow stripes, the long throat of hell leading out and in was cleaned by the workaday stringy devils, sons of sons of sons, and almost forgotten. The queen, filled with expectation, was writing on a purple page her daily argument to Him, with a subscriptum in a lyrical tone with many polysyllables and all flexible like an interesting toy, to him. Today, she said, is the day, and it was. Albert, frère, and his God, the husband, watched from a narrow heavenly perch, just room enough for the two, one on the lap of the other and freshly washed and combed like two open-faced May flowers, one larger and older, one smaller and pointy eared. There she is, they said, and she was, in her perfect Hell laces and ivory furbelows, all in a whited white with white trim and a white sheen over all of Hell, a big white bowl with the flies of Hell skimming around in their indecency. Father and Godson clung a little tighter to each other in the joy, but also in the fear, Albert's tight fists made stunted apples of the cloth of his father's golden garment.

VI

Albert heard his name in the night: A. He heard it and his eyes rimmed with pink amazement. He knew someone else could hear it too, if he chose to hear. And then he listened for his name again, and it came again: Aa. He waited still for the other hearing, but the night was a wad of opaline silence and not even a hearing could twink or tap through it. Still waited.

Silently and periodically, a mother entered the room and out swept her white arm, dangling from it a devil or the complete arlequin, tense and tightly coiled with vitality. Albert's eyes rimmed with pink amazement until all pink and ghastly, horrible pinwheels of light and rotation.

The arlequin leapt from the arm and settled on the diamond quilt of the bed, invisible now for its pattern and pure activity, a whir of energy and turbid life. Another thing was entering the room with its own animality and the room darkened for the scintillant battle, a spray of blows and hideous marks, a music of cries and vocal darts, sings, punctuations, alerts. The arlequin, something so small, was humming dangerously, moving faster and faster in its sinister open spins and counter-spins.

Suddenly night broke open to the calm play of violet morning and Albert, his eyes burnt corks, opened his eyes and spread their beams so hurt and small into the room illuminated in mild stripes and matinal flats.

The arlequin there in the matching quilt was asleep on its face, or dead. Farther in the room and away from the bed was the matched couple, Hell and deity, in a flat package together, a twirling unity with the two sides. Albert lay his dawn cheek on the pillow, the tenderest of flesh pockets and felt the sun, a new God, dancing or skating on it and up his sweetly pale arm, plus the air, the freshet from the twirling twin. His eyelids closed over the blue firmament and the clear mirrored surfaces and all the thoughts of the world returned to a unity, a flowery black walnut slipping through the deep internal cracks of the Northern city.

STEPHEN RODEFER

ANEMIC CINEMA

If this paesano asks me to move over or get out of this coffin,
I go back to the streets. If Marie calls, I'm not in.
I could never figure her. The world's number one figure
And nobody wrapped her up and took her home.
Some people have to be happy because they are nothing but rich.
Forming on little roofs around some little royalty, the pretender
Is king, though his wife is English and a commoner.
They rule the international set. You figure it. I can't.

It was at one of the smaller casinos, kind of late.
We'd finished gambling. We hadn't eaten together since lunch.
Every night is like every other night. Off screen you never laugh.
Next to another you have the body of an animal.
More of the same for the king. Is the gigolo known
To anyone? It *is* a born medicine—it kills pain.
I feel terrible charging my customers for gas.
Come on, Charlie, get behind the wheel. Welcome to the Bahamas.

She looked at me for no more than a beat and a half,
But I knew that I would remember her as long as I lived,
If I lived that long. When I got to Rome I decided to get to work.
She was the bride on whom the rain did fall.
She would be trousseau shopping. I know now that F was filled
With a moaning uneasiness, realizing that he was what other men
Were not, and vice versa. He wanted nothing more
Than to wait till they heard about this in southern California.

As you can see they have insisted on this bare face.
In an ancient chapel witnessed by a handful of strangers
The bride gave the groom the customary finger. Nobody could tell
Me that it was like this when the Borgias got married.
There was more going on inside the place than out.
Verago was the pastry cook, great but unspoke.
I listened for a message above the rhubarb but it was crazy;
I've forgotten the Spanish for Cinderella but have a glass anyway.

I saw her just once after the wedding night.
Twice really, but the second time she was dead.
She wrote the book on broken marriages.
The first time was exactly a week ago.
I was holed up in my hotel room, doing some writing.
She hadn't driven there in a rainstorm not to get a looksee.
There are some things which must be said sometimes for which
There may be no words. How much more like a dream can a dream be?

For a contessa who don't drink that's cognac.
You are proud but it is time to wake up.
First it's boloney, then it's stuffed birds,
Now cupcakes. Suppose he doesn't see it your way.
You have your baby anyway. In a base hospital
In Bengazi his body is blown apart in an explosion.
If you read the report you understand how only some parts remained.
This is why she has never been able to love anybody else since.

TWO POEMS

THE GARDEN

Oleander: coral
from lipstick ads in the 50s.

Fruit of the tree of *such* knowledge.

To "smack"
(thin air)
meaning kiss or hit.

It appears
in the guise of outworn usages
because we are bad?

Big masculine threat,
insinuating and slangy.

SENSE

Twigs stiffen
the fingers.

Love of nature
is a translation.

Secret nodding
in the figurative:

a corroboration
which is taken for
"companion."

a saw warbles,
somewhere,
and the yards too
are terraced.

*

Stress the birds lay
on that wire.

"*Poss*ibly"
holy parental emphases.

Big screen.

On the other side of
siding
cars go by.

String of fat
commas
as far as
we're concerned.

*

First the (non)sense
of direction.

"Stones to frogs,
then to princes
who do a circle dance
and turn to stone."

Good-night!

Meaning extends
her arm backward
ballerina-like:

wood-swirl
in the formica.

JAMES HILLMAN AND CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

PART ONE OF A DISCUSSION ON PSYCHOLOGY AND POETRY

CE: I propose that the first thing we address is two essays by Jung and what they imply about an opposition between psychology and art. In "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," written in 1922, Jung states that art and psychology cannot be compared. While he acknowledges that they have close connections, and that the connections arise from the fact that the practice of art is a psychological activity, he still wants to keep them separate. He then makes a distinction between intentional and spontaneous art, and sets forth these two categories as follows:

Intentional Art	Spontaneous Art
"sentimental"	"naive"
Introverted	Extroverted
A conscious art, one that does not challenge comprehension	An unconscious art, one that is supra-personal and transcends understanding.

In an essay written in 1929, "Psychology and Literature," Jung moreorless maintains these two categories, but expresses them in a terminology more appropriate to his own psychological thinking:

Psychological Art	Visionary Art
Art that nowhere transcends the bounds of psychological understanding.	Art arising from primordial experience, grotesque, demonic, beyond historical and mythological events.

In both essays, Jung clearly shows a preference for the spontaneous/visionary category, and he seems to be proposing something incompatible between cogitative, planned activity and inspired, "seized" activity—in fact, in the 1922 essay, he states that "as long as we are caught up in the process of creation, we neither see nor understand; indeed we ought not to understand, for nothing is more injurious to immediate experience than cognition."

My experience has been that Jung's oppositional categories are backed up by the majority of significant 20th century poetry. Few poets would use Jung's terminology, but most would participate in some form of oppositionalism, whether it is Dionysus vs. Apollo, Romantic vs. Classical, or experimental vs. traditional. The tendency is to believe that there is a kind of Blakean antinomy between the "prolific" and the "devouring," Devils vs. Angels, that is an essential aspect of poetry itself, and that this "war" is played out from generation to generation, with each side accusing the other of not really being what they propose to represent. While it may be that a yin/yang coherence of the new warring with the old is essential to imaginative movement, the poetic products always seem to be heavily indebted to one of the two sides.

Rainer Maria Rilke, who would be close to Jung's spontaneous/visionary category, articulately defends what could be thought of as an anti-analytical and anti-revisionary position that is dependent upon an inspirational wind or angel sweeping through the poet. In a 1921 letter, he wrote, "I believe that as soon as an artist has found the living center of his activity, nothing is so important for him as to remain in it and never go further away from it (for it is also the center of his personality, his world) than up to the inside wall of what he is quietly and steadily giving forth; his place is *never*, not even for an instant, alongside the observer and judge." Now, this observer or judge—is this the doctor, the psychologist, the man of science?

JH: Yes, I think so, but I also think that the notion of the psychologist as man of science/observer—I think that's where the trouble is. I think that psychologists have fallen into that. They have imagined themselves to be objective, outside critics. Or they have imagined themselves to be interpreters, or commentators, and in the scientific flow, even Freud was there. But the psychologist who is inside his own response is not necessarily outside either, and he is risking, and up against the wall, of his own place, I don't want to say center, but place.

CE: You mean that when Freud is working with Leonardo da Vinci, you think of him as doing primary, creative, imaginative work, even though he is responding to a previous text?

JH: Yes, and his genre is different, and his writing style is different. It's not effuse, it's not based on rhythm, it's not based on what I would call a poetic genre of writing, but there is poesis going on in it.

CE: Would you go so far as to agree with Jung's statement in regard to what you've just said about Freud? I mean, where he says that as long as we're caught up in the process of creation, we neither see nor understand.

JH: I would not agree. Because I think Jung is sharing the same viewpoint

as Rilke here. And I wouldn't agree with that. I would say that when you're in the midst of the process of—I don't want to use the word "creation" either, it tends to get inflated—but in the midst of writing, or speaking a poem, or whatever, let's just say writing, there is a seeing going on in the hand and in the heart, and in the eye, which is not the kind of seeing that Jung is talking about which is detached outside seeing, but the fingers have an eye in them. E-Y-E. An eye that knows to put this word and not that word and to cross that out suddenly and to jump to the next thing. That's all seeing. It's not blind. That's again a romantic sense that there's natural creativity and then there's detached scientific observation.

CE: The eyes are in the fingers—meaning, there is an organizing going on that is perhaps not rational in the sense that it would be used in the context of logic. But it is rational or coherent to the creative process itself.

JH: Absolutely! And I even believe, even in Nietzsche, or in Goethe's *Faust*, which you could say are "spontaneous" in Jung's language, extremely spontaneous, or without guilt, there is a built-in critical learned tradition. It's not absent. Those are not simply effusions. Human consciousness is built into their language, and it isn't even *their* language. It's built into *the* language, perhaps, and their access to language through learning. That's perhaps another side of the issue we're looking at. I mean, it's not some sort of primordial effusion. It's terribly formed as well.

CE: So one way to approach the split is to think that the role of imaginational activity as associated with the poem has been too weighted on the side of the unconscious or of the effusion in which the poet is viewed as this kind of receptacle through whom the power moves, but who has, as it were, no control over the power. And then the psychologist is weighted too far, as he who is in control, he who is, as it were, judging the process, evaluating the process.

JH: Absolutely. In other words, the discussion has always used the terminology of a certain court model, which splits consciousness from unconsciousness, reason from unreason, creation from criticism, and I think it is, fundamentally, a romantic paradigm. And it puts great weight on access. That the poet is a special person who has access to this beyond. Therefore, the poet is put in the category with the insane, the child, and the primitive and, at one time, women. They all had special access to this beyond.

CE: Well, it is a very nifty way of containment. It's a way to applaud and view the poet on Parnassus at the same time that you can definitely say he is irresponsible, and has no real responsible relationship to what he is doing.

JH: It's a very nifty way both to condemn and praise.

CE: I'd like to keep the Rilke statement before us for a bit longer. It is not clear from his statement about the living center vs. the observer and judge, whether he would admit conscious, intentional shaping as a valid part of the creative process. Does he mean that the artist should not judge or observe his work while it is being created, or merely not assume the role of observer/judge when he is not creating? As you may know, Rilke had a deep-seated fear of correction. In 1912, when he was seriously considering Freudian analysis, he wrote to Lou Andreas-Salome: "I rather shun this getting cleared out and, with my nature, could hardly expect anything good of it. Something like a disinfected soul results from it, a monstrosity, alive, corrected in red like the page of a school notebook." While Rilke did not appear to mind if analysis exorcised his "devils"—thinking of them as neurotic habits, I guess, rather than as chthonic powers—he feared that the loss of his angels would mean that he would stop writing altogether.

His desire to stay at what he calls "the living center of his activity" must have involved a lot of observation and judgment. In fact, his concentrated, relentless effort to organize his entire life around his art seems to oppose what would otherwise be considered a highly romantic position. It is as if with great planning and rationality, Rilke built a wall around himself, entered this *temenos*, and then waited, refusing to act creatively unless he was acted upon, "seized," as it were, by one of his angels.

Another point: Freudian analysis in Rilke's day seems to have regarded creativity as being analogous to pathological processes—in fact, while not reductive in the way that Freud can be (seeing images as cover-figures or concealments of basic personal life experience), Jung himself states in the 1922 essay: "The divine frenzy of the artist comes perilously close to a pathological state." If Rilke believed that Freud believed that works of art were an expression of human pathology, he was probably smart to stay away from analysis.

JH: Now, Clayton, we can't take seriously this "divine frenzy" idea! I know that authority from Plato through Jung argues for it. I know it still appears in notions of the artist as shaman or medicine-man for the tribe, or the artist in league with the devil as in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. But these words "divine" and "frenzy" have to be unpacked because they come loaded with unconscious Protestant theology, where divine means some glossolaic trance state descending from the Wholly Other (Rudolph Otto), and where "frenzy" means madness, pathology, instead of what it might once have meant when Gods were present in the actual world, in Rilke's sense, and not only present in subjective states of possession. "Divine frenzy" then, and now, could mean something far different from Jung's "pathological state." It could mean very close participation with or immersion in actual reality—reality as the radiance of the actual world rather

than the descent of inspiration from another world or lifting off to another world. Besides, we have to unpack these words in regard to Jung himself, autobiographically, his anxiety regarding Nietzsche, Dionysus and Wotan. I examined this complex very closely in a paper published in the book I edited called *Facing the Gods*, and you can see in that paper how Jung's division regarding art and psychology parallels his division in himself between personality Number One and personality Number Two. Nietzsche, Dionysus and Wotan as well as the artist, the shaman and the madman are all possibilities of personality Number Two. You see, the entire structure in which Jung casts his life, let's say the narrative of his self-diagnosis, is also the structure he uses to view the artist. Pat worked this out in great length in her study of Jung's buried aesthetics, and we shall have to come back to it with her later. That really is her subject: aesthetics or poetics in relation to psychology.

CE: Let's go on then with Freud and Rilke. There is good evidence that Rilke's masterpiece, the *Duino Elegies*, was begun by the poet's despair that should he call out for divine aid, no angel would hear him. The entire work opens: "Who if I cried out would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence." This suggests that if the artist feels that his chosen position, as it were, has abandoned him, he will move to the opposite pole and, like Rilke, set himself on fire by attacking the betraying angel.

All this leads me to believe that we must re-imagine the psychology of cognition, bricolage and inspiration. Perhaps we could begin to do so by asking why Jung insisted on a dichotomy. Was he basing his theories on Classical vs. Romantic "ideals" as manifest in particular works of art, or was he saying something about human sensibility and the extent to which it is creatively limited—that there is something about "us" that experiences creativity as an either/or situation?

After stating that in the process of creation we neither see nor understand, Jung goes ahead to write: ". . . for the purpose of cognitive understanding we must detach ourselves from the creative process and look at it from the outside; only then does it become an image that expresses what we are bound to call 'meaning.' " Clearly, he is referring only to "spontaneous" or "visionary" art here (and by implication relegating *his* other kind of art to a very secondary role). Jung's statement strongly suggests that an artist does not know what his activity signifies while he is doing it. I think this is nearly always partially but *only partially* true—the "muse" of Picasso's "Guernica" was a squad of German bombers (when asked by some German officers, standing before the canvas, "Did you do this?" he is said to have replied, "No, you did")—but I think it is fair to assume that throughout the process of doing the painting, Picasso was

aware of the significance of what he was creating—he may not have had an accurate sense as to what extent the world was going to consider it significant, but the fact that its execution was in part a response to a horrible event "out there" creates an immediate field of meaning.

JH: I think Jung's emphasis on the Spontaneous takes aim at those who reduce a poem or painting to an external field of meaning—those German Stuka Bombers. The field of meaning "out there" is always part of the context from which a dream, a poem, or anything flows, but that field of meaning is not the cause, or the substance, or the meaning of the dream, poem etc. Psychology often misses this point in practice. It either literalizes the Spontaneous and cuts off an event from any external field of meaning or it literalizes the field of meaning and reduces the event to it. Spontaneous has to be understood not literally, but spontaneous within a specific image or context in which the spontaneity appears. Appears *here*, and only *here*, and not somewhere else.

CE: Jung also places strong emphasis on "the primordial" when he discusses "Visionary" art. It is "a primordial vision which surpasses man's understanding . . . it arises from timeless depths; it is foreign and cold, many-sided, demonic and grotesque . . . it suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages. . . ." I find this definition to be very troublesome; in fact, I do not know how I could accommodate it to most of the poetry I consider to be visionary, because regardless of the extent of the prophetic activity, it is anchored in the anguish of its own times and is, to varying degrees, an imaginative adjustment, or a reaction, against thwarted desire. It appears as if Jung only regarded art of the considerable past when he made his comments about psychology and art, or that there is something inherently distancing in both of his defined artistic categories. To separate the intentional from the spontaneous, or the psychological from the visionary, is to draw a line down the center of much art that participates in all four modes. It seems to be ultimately undermining to the creative process, and in effect subordinates the artist to the observer or judge. Each "type," for Jung, is incomplete, and two incompletes do not add up to a single "whole" artist. It is not only a curious way of exalting and castrating the artist at the same time, but it performs the same kind of elevation/subordination on the work of the psychologist or "judge." His compensation for not being primordially creative is to be seen as a healthy, wise, responsible citizen, empowered with the right to extend or deny significance.

JH: I seem to be trapped into opposing Jung, yet I can't help feeling annoyed by this word "primordial." Am I hanging on words? Why do I dislike "primordial"—probably because it brings with it all those half-thought-through Darwinian assumptions, cavemen as apemen, developmental

history toward the light, and the notion of ourselves as refined, effete, weak-kneed dilettantes making up ineffectual trivia with our minds while deep underneath in the past or in the soul lies grunting primordial truth. This notion of "primordial" leads to an effusionist notion of art, art production based on an altered state of consciousness. Laudanum, absinthe, gin, LSD, cocaine. But what about art as craft, art in cultures where there is no "art" as we call it, where there are only chants made for rituals, objects made for eating, where there is exquisitely complicated dancing, body-painting and masking? These cultures are also "primordial," and yet not merely wild, savage or volcanic. Isn't it told that the people of Bali, for instance, when asked about their "art," reply by saying they don't know what that is; they simply make things as well as they can. No effusion or inspiration here, maybe no novelty either, but at least the everyday and the Gods, the ordinary and the beautiful are not divided from each other. So I prefer "primordial" to mean essential or irreducible. So, a painting by Edward Hopper of a gas-station or a cafeteria at night is so exactly irreducible to anything beyond itself, so descriptive of the despairing American soul (which is both its referent and not its referent), that this careful, almost mathematical, image is primordial because it is essential.

CE: How would this sense of the primordial as exactly crafted and irreducibly essential—certainly a sense very different from Jung's "archaic" or "primitive" or "undifferentiated" meaning of the word—affect your practice?

JH: Practice of writing or practice of analysis?

CE: Analysis with patients.

JH: It saves me from prejudicially valuing the wild man or the tiger above the media commentator or the spaniel. You see, "deep" does not have to be equated with archaic. Low and basic do not have to mean primitive. Depth can appear by digging down into an ordinary feeling and ordinary event.

CE: The tiger and the wild man do have a terrifying power which some might think was primordial in its impact.

JH: O, sure. But in therapy so can the spaniel have this impact when you recognize yourself as a fawning, tail-wagging puppy. Sometimes it's easier to feel yourself a tiger, with all that so-called primoridal power. You see, in therapy, the moves one makes with a symbolic image rather than the inherent meanings of the symbol are where the power lies. Isn't it the same for poetry, too? Aren't there marvelously primordial poems with red wheelbarrows and jars on hills and terrible poems with wild men and tigers?

CE: I get your point, but frankly I only know one fine red wheelbarrow poem, a so-so Tennessee jar poem, and a great tyger poem. There is a certain oppositionalism that creeps into your mild vs. savage examples. Ideally, I would like to have poems in which wild men pushed wheelbarrows filled with jars and tigers through the hills.

Perhaps we should consider to what extent "access" and "the beyond" are terms that hold up under scrutiny. W.H. Auden has argued that the loss of belief in the eternity of the physical universe, including a loss of belief in the significance and reality of sensory phenomena, have made an artistic vocation more difficult that it used to be. "The beyond" may be a booby prize for those who have lost contact with what is at hand—or as Charles Olson tried to drive home via Heraclitus: "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." It is as if at a certain point in his history man left the thing at hand to quest for immortality, and when that pursuit was revealed to be empty, he was left with the thing at hand, the soul of which had withered from being untended for so long. We now live in a world with a broken beyond and a plastic cup, and one reason that you and I are talking here is because of this. We both seek to lift the essential up through the consumer film and work with it in imagination without vatic inflation.

Because the poet no longer performs a useful function in society, he is to a great extent parked to the side in a playpen where he can dream and say anything. If his writing is entertaining, he is occasionally picked up and carried about in adult arms for a little soul titillation. But the serious poet is not entertaining. He is still involved, as I believe you are, with attempting through sounding his own adhesion and estrangement to engage a reader or hearer. Unlike the psychologist, however, his address is more elliptical, harder to get hold of, because he proceeds associationally instead of logically. I think it is a proven fact that an educated person could grasp a good deal of one of Jung's lectures on literature and psychology, but that the same person would be lost on a first or second hearing of *The Waste Land.* On the other hand, your writing in, say, "Blue and the Unio Mentalis," which was appropriately published in *Sulfur* magazine, tends to engage associational, or paratactical alignments, so that the argument slides, or moves sideways as it moves forward.

One of the reasons that poets and psychologists have been out of touch is due to the poet's lack of psychological sophistication. From the Romantic viewpoint, such sophistication would be suspect, because the moment of inspiration is absolute and not to be understood by the poet who is to function like a gate (or radio, in Jack Spicer's modern version), through which the poem rushes. I know the thrill, or the bony certainty, of absolute address, and I am tempted, when it occurs, to believe it is the truth, and that it should not be tampered with, regardless of how it looks a week later (awkward, inaccurate, inadequate etc.), for to think of it as

scrutinizable is to regard it as mortal, changeable, capable of error, revisable. I think that possibly poets who assert the absolute truth of inspired address do so because they do not want to deal with what other aspects of their mind tells them has occurred at the inspired moment. In that sense, they could be considered psychologically irresponsible.

In his 1929 formulation, Jung puts the poet in an impossible situation: if his writing *is* psychological, meaning if it remains within the bounds of psychological intelligibility, it is, by the way the definition is set up, inferior – a kind of poeticized psychology, versified discourse. If on the other hand, it is visionary, arising out of "primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding," who can possibly care about it? It may be worshipped by a handful of people, who will pass it around like a chunk from outer space, people who adore unintelligibility as an end in itself, and if there are enough "followers," over the years a critical "house" will be built for it, and it will enter the canon as one of the diamonds in the national literary tiara.

I realize that by putting it this way, I am on the verge of saying that because a Blake was not understandable to virtually anyone for at least 100 years after his death, that he is solely responsible. Much of Blake now appears to be understandable *and* visionary, so that possibility must be kept open – that art which surpasses contemporary understanding can be judged unintelligible for reasons that have little to do with its value. Because it offends taste and style, say, people may claim that it is unintelligible.

JH: Let's set aside the word psychological for a moment and just talk about the responsibility of the poet. To what is he responsible? Is he not responsible to the poem? Or responsible to receiving, getting out of the way of what Robert Duncan might call "the angels and the demons?" So that he isn't in the way of that, doesn't disturb that, but lets it come through well? Doesn't the poet sense a responsibility in the act of his work?

CE: Getting out of the way of the angels and demons and being responsible to the poem is fine as long as it does not mean a cessation of thinking. To use your image, it means insisting that the angels and demons emerge from the midnight murkiness of the corner of the studio and allow their teeth and messages to be checked out. I believe that there should be a constant critical pressure applied to irrational message. However, if you are arguing that one reason poems fail is because the speaker has foregrounded himself at the expense of imaginational activity, I agree. Then the poem takes on very small grounds and finally only becomes the poet's "scene," e.g., a description of something that he once did – and for him to offer this as his experience is not enough.

JH: Certainly not enough. But I say it is comparable with ego-psychology.

It's comparable with the reduction of the extraordinary that goes on in a dream, and in a life, to my personal experience of it. And psychology, for the most part, today is comparable then with poetry for the most part—it teaches you to do that. That's what a psychological training is supposed to do, is to turn the imaginal richness of the psyche into your own personal account of it. So you lose the archetypal dimension, you lose what you call the imaginational activity. You lose the whole sense of the gods in art in your life. And the focus is on "me," not on the gods. When Rilke keeps turning us back, when he says to get inside your own experience, he doesn't mean it in the subjectivist modern sense of inside your own ego experience. Inside your own experience is focused on the giving back. Because your experience, as I try to say too, in what I write, is not yours, it is the soul's, and the soul is inherently related to the gods, so that being in the center of your experience is not being in the center of what we commonly call "my" experience. The "my" is sort of "ausgehoben" (lifted out, removed).

CE: I was talking with Rosemary, the woman who picked me up at the [Dallas] airport the other day. She was asking me questions such as "What is your experience of yourself in the poem?" I made a distinction between the fictive or imaginational "I" in contrast to the autobiographical "I," and suggested that the freedom for any "I" to appear in the poem, for there to be a shifting sense of "I" that does not lock into autobiographical frame, was one way to approach the experience of oneself in the poem. The image I offered her, colored by my involvement with Upper Paleolithic cave paintings of animals, went like this: I am in the driver's seat, I initiate the poem as driver, but as the poem gets under way, there is a sense of being outside and almost, to stir the metaphor, of running with an animal, say, through a field, so while it is clearly CE sitting in his room doing the writing, there is the sense that the less I interfere, in other words, it is like having this animal bounding . . .

JH: That's a wonderful image. Wonderful. That's marvelous. And you don't want to lose touch with the animal by making wrong moves of your own. So, your self-consciousness is focussed on keeping-in-touch. Isn't that why one says, right in the middle of writing something, "O, I've lost it. It's gone." By this I mean I've lost touch with that leaping, bounding (or burrowing) animal. I do believe this is what we mean when we say we've lost our concentration. The nose is on a scent, tracking, and all of a sudden, the track is gone. This keeping on the track, or what's called concentration, is one focus of self-consciousness. It's a dim awareness, of honing, of direction, of attentiveness. But it's not *will*. It's not willing yourself to the track as if it is my personal intention to squeeze out of myself just what I want to say in this paragraph—although that kind of self-consciousness can come in too. Sometimes, losing the track may simply be picking up on a cross scent. Another animal lures the line of thought

into another part of the forest. This feels like a distraction, dis-track-shun, and just here still another kind of self-consciousness appears: oscillating between two ways to pursue. Then, there's another kind of self-consciousness or dim awareness. To do with rhythm or beat. To do with form. I feel what I am writing is getting too long or wordy. This kind of focus is on the overall fantasy of the piece as a whole. It is very much in my mind when I write something—that it not break out of the dimension of the piece. I think this is the psychological experience of what Aristotle called *unity*. Probably this sense of unity makes you know when a piece ends, when it is over. How do you know when it's over?

CE: Difficult. I often over- or under-write. I don't have any solution to that question. There can be a certain let-down, a pointless distraction, suddenly I realize that for the past minute I have been staring out the window. The being-with-the-poem is intense enough that I can understand why Jung would make the statement about not understanding or seeing while one is in the creative task. I would assert that there is a seeing and understanding going on in my writing that is different than my not seeing you if you walked by the window while I was writing.

I occasionally have the experience of Caryl being away from the house, and when she reappears, and I hear the front door open, or she will say hello, I'll stop writing—but that will always be in the case of a first draft being written out when I have no idea where it is to go, or end. Even though the thing has not come to conclusion, I will look at it again later and often realize that the energy terminated at that point.

JH: Conclusion is one of the important things in Duncan, and Charles Olson, this realizing that the poem doesn't come to a conclusion.

CE: To pick up again the image of the poem-in-process as an animal—it evokes a passage in the 1922 Jung essay, where he writes: "We would do well to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche. In the language of analytical psychology this living thing is an *autonomous complex*. It is a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness." How would you respond to this?

JH: Let me hear some more.

CE: Jung goes ahead to say that this psychic formation remains "subliminal until its energy charge is sufficient to carry it over the threshold into consciousness." Apparently, his use of the word "consciousness" here is an artistically cogent one, and not that "consciousness" whose assistance the artist does not need in achieving his purposes. Can you clarify this?

JH: No, I can't, or I don't want to try. "Consciousness" is such a fuzz word. I can't understand what goes on while writing by using psychodynamic

terms. These physical metaphors of "energy," "threshold," "sufficient (quantity)" don't say anything to me. But the phrase, "leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy," gives me an image of a living complex, a daimon or animal, with whom I must keep in touch for anything alive to be written at all. Translations into psychodynamic concepts—which, by the way, aren't psychological but are rather abstractions from the physics of electricity (poles, negative and positive, thresholds, resistance, energy)—are not phenomenological. They aren't speaking to the psyche in the psyche's own imagery and language. They aren't even empirical, though they persuade us into believing we are empirical because the language is borrowed from the empirical science of electrical engineering. I may have interrupted your thought, but this passage you quoted from Jung just gets in the way of the animal-tracking metaphor.

CE: The question also arises as to what makes the so-called energy charge sufficient to carry it over, meaning, I think, to make the artist begin to apply himself to a new project, or more precisely, to activate the kind of fantasies that delight or unsettle him to the extent that he begins to actively work with them. Duncan provides an interesting example of the eruption of a physical charge into an imaginative one, when in his essay "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," he writes: " 'Up Rising' [a poem in *Bending the Bow*, 1968] belongs not only to the political cast of the day but also to the imagination of Man and his time that I address in the series without end ["Passages"] to which the poem belongs. Riding the wave at once of my own high blood pressure—a physical disorder I was ignorant of at the time but to which the poem clearly refers—and of my outrage in the 'high blood pressure' attack of the American government upon Viet Nam . . . riding the wave of my outrage I saw Johnson as the demotic leader, unleashing into action and moved by the secret evil of American karma as Hitler or Stalin had impersonated the evil karma of Germany or Russia."

In Duncan's context, his rising blood pressure cathects a "duende" of interior inspiration that brings his sense of outer rage into an inner rage of body and soul. Do you feel that this is an accurate example of Jung's formulation?

JH: But, Clayton, do we have to imagine the uprising as a *transformation of energy*? From physical to imaginational? Can't we also imagine the uprising as a sympathy, a concord, a concurrence of various uprising autonomies which include high blood pressure, the US high over Vietnam, the uprising of outrage, and the inspiration of this poem in its coming?

CE: Of course, Jim, but "uprising autonomies" seems as conceptual, if that is what is bothering you about "transformation of energy," which is ac-

tually your own twist of Jung's statement, as the latter term. My point was to inquire if Jung's terminology made sense to you, and to see if Duncan's own description of the writing of "Up Rising," which gives as prime sources physical illness and outrage, was a meaningful example. Your response seems to want to place the emphasis on the mental—"autonomies"—over the physical. My experience as a man who writes poetry has been that my use of my body is a huge component in restricting or amplifying the fantasies and, yes, concurrences, that I am given to work with as a writer.

A primary example would be the discharge of orgastic energy and consequent hallucinations, which has led me to believe that a thorough physical sexual expression stimulates, rather than restricts, my image-making capacity, and that there is a kind of "antiphonal swing" between sexual flow and imaginative flow. As you know, I am a Reichian initiate, and I spent two years in orthodox Reichian therapy in the late 60s because my sexual rigidity up to that point had seemed to be the cause of much of my misery and inability to do what I wanted to as a writer. It may be hard to believe now, but at the time I left Indiana in 1961 I believed, on the basis of a bewildering Protestant upbringing, that sexual activity stole from creative activity. To develop this material at this point would probably be too much of a detour, but it seems to me that Jung's term "energy charge" is an essential consideration, a term that needs to be scrutinized as much as "primordial" or "divine frenzy." I am convinced that there is a sexual alchemy at work, for better or for worse, in what I make as an artist.

JH: There is a lot of literature on sexual practices; Tantric etc. This is a very widespread fantasy, but I wouldn't take it literally. The psychological question I would put to you, or anyone who makes direct connections between physical sex and poetic images, is: what is this fantasy doing for you? Why does it help you to write? And write what? What specific kinds of fantasies occur in relation to orgasm that are different from fantasies at other times? And what are your fantasies about orgasm? Reich had lots of them which Reichians consider to be not fantasies but theories. You see, I would be exploring the actual pragmatic way these fantasies work in regards to both your sexual life and your poetic life rather than be discussing whether you have a valid hypothesis about energy transformations. I would be exploring the rhetoric of the idea rather than validating the idea.

CE: Why don't we continue our discussion, then, concerning the act of writing itself, bearing in mind Jung's troubling claim that while we are doing so we neither see nor understand.

JH: Neither see nor understand. And the process, one doesn't ask how

to conclude the poem, one asks when does the process come to its resolution? I am thinking now about parallels, not with my own writing, which is rather similar in a way, except probably I am struggling with external forms more. I have a 40 minute lecture to give, or I have a 2 hour lecture to give, or I have this audience to address, and that is one of the conditions that goes into the work. That gives it certain conclusions, certain places of closings, so it isn't only the process.

CE: So, you're suggesting that you must be aware of your so-called audience at the same time that you're writing your lecture?

JH: Partly, yes.

CE: Do you see this as a distraction?

JH: No, I see it as a part of the grain of the wood that I'm working on. Part of the given of the material. To whom I'm talking, when I've got to get it done. Those, so-called external conditions are part of a formative, a *causa formalis*, even the *causa materialis*, part of the material I have to work with, this fantasy audience, so this language is going to be involved.

CE: You wouldn't see that as a negative term, then?

JH: No.

CE: I had in mind the comment that you made at one point in *Inter Views*, of what seems to be the problem of understanding relative to intelligibility, and I was wondering if there would be, you see, in terms of the poem, I would think that if I thought of you, and of your understanding of what I was doing—while I am working on the poem—Is Jim going to get this, how is this going to sound to Hillman, then somehow I'm off.

JH: OK. Stay there just a second. Somehow you're off. And yet many poems are written with another person in mind, dedicated to, and not just the dedication put in at the end . . . I'm thinking of . . . Well, maybe you don't regard . . . I don't know who you like, as poets, who you don't—

CE: Use anyone.

JH: —but Edith Sitwell just came into my mind. So many poems have that fantasy figure, fantasy audience, as part of the poem. That again has to do with the thing not being blind. But the poem is also social, communication, relation, love.

CE: I would say that the more I am in touch with this imaginative process, the more faith I have that there *will* be something called communication. In other words, I am not against the idea of an audience, that there

is a reader "out there," but I feel that if I think of you, take you into consideration *while writing* that this represents a distraction.

JH: You know, Clayton, that's absolutely true. And there's just two ways, two sides of the same thing, and both are true. When I write for Eranos which is usually when I try to do something over a long period, it takes me many months to write those two hours. Only two hours. It takes me months. And I always imagine that I'm writing you can tell David Miller and others when you write your Eranos paper, you're speaking to the dead. You're writing for the dead. You're writing to the tradition. You're not writing to the people sitting in that room. When you start thinking of them, and there is a communication to keep didactic or anything of that sort, you're finished. And you have to write in such a way that you'll never be invited back again. Because it won't be understood. So you're writing to the tradition.

CE: You're writing to the chairs.

JH: Yes, you're writing to the tradition, you're writing to the chairs, you're writing to the lecturers who aren't there any more, like Corbin, or you're writing to the dead. Now, so there I agree with you. You can't think of somebody special living, will he get it. And yet, there is also something very important – for me it's important – the urge for clarity, the urge for the right word, the urge for a rhythm that will carry the thing along, the condensations, all of that is partly – I can't distinguish between getting it right and getting it right for where it's placed. The so-called audience.

CE: It occurs to me that both the psychologist and the poet have two audiences: the living and the dead. In a recent poem of mine, an unidentified voice says to both the reader and the author: "Forget the orchestra / conduct the pit." We are both, when we are imaginatively alive, conductors of the pit. We try to snake-charm its depths, to draw up figures that will sway in rhythm to our own processes. In this sense, what a conventional lecturer might consider his audience, we think of as chairs, the dead, the pit. But I think we have living audiences too: in your case I wonder if you have not considered your patients this way, for in therapy you cannot just address the chair someone is sitting upon, but the person himself who is constantly redirecting the conversation. I know to think of a patient as your audience may seem strange, and I do not mean to imply that the patient is passive and you are active, but that as you exchange you also pour yourself forth to another there, who has filled the emptiness of the Eranos chair. We are linked by Blake's: "The most sublime act is to set another before you." Meaning that not only is this a profoundly human gesture, to place another *before* oneself, but that the presence of the other, another, sublimates the speaker, makes him consider before speaking in a way he would not have to if he were speaking to himself.

My "living audience" is my wife, Caryl. I have no audience in a literal, popular sense, and consider that to be a blessing as well as a curse. But because Caryl goes over everything I write, querying everything she finds confused, after I have started a piece of writing and before I finish it on my own, I know that her presence and her words are entangled with my own.

JH: My relation with Pat is very different. I don't want her or anyone anywhere to see anything of a main piece I may be working on. While I'm working on it, and until it is delivered—or finally typed up—it's "secret, cunning and exile." Probably I'm too heroic, or I'm under the fear of influence. I do consult with Pat, or maybe a friend, about a particular thought that I can't get straight, or where I feel blocked in a particular passage. During those moments of consultation I feel terribly vulnerable. The work seems terribly fragile and I feel myself at the edge of both a crazy excitement about it and despair over how confused and inadequate it is. In other words, I am utterly too close to it: I'm inside my own text.

But you asked me about the patient as audience. Many times a patient is "not there," the patient is "merely" audience to what begins to speak in me to it. This "it" being the dream, the question, the situation, or whatever we are in. These impersonal unaddressed moments are some of the best moments (at least for me) during an analysis because I am hearing things I never said quite so lucidly before. Maybe the patient hears them, but they are only partly addressed to him or her. They are addressed really below to the patient's underworld. You can say this is my schizoid nature or you can say this sort of indirect address, which might be like the persona of the author rather than the biographical author, is necessary for freeing the imagination. Some patients provide better audiences for these riffs. They are not directed at the patient but they are evoked by the patient, in relation with the patient, and are very much focussed upon what the patient is concerned with—the dream, the question, the situation. Still, the pronouns "you" and "yours" are not the form of address. Perhaps this independent imaginative intervention is the voice of the "outside" psychological observer in the best sense. Outside no longer literally only outside.

CE: I see we are still working over the Rilkean observer and judge. In my case, it would be possible for someone such as Caryl to become judge or doctor. But I think of her more as a kind of dialogic middle, in the process of writing the poem—I would like to think that I have overcome Rilke's "objection" by bringing her into the "creative center."

JH: But there's another person there, isn't there?

CE: Yes—at crucial points.

JH: There's nothing you do by yourself.

CE: I do write pieces from time to time that need no revision. I show them to Caryl and she agrees. On another level, it is questionable if any artist does his work by himself, even in his most inspired moments. There has been no original art since the Upper Paleolithic, or around 32,000 BC. All of us are crawling with grandfathers and grandmothers not only when we are sitting writing, but when we are thinking about what we are writing, or dreaming, or chopping zucchini. However, again, the emphasis on the artist as his own solitary master is especially understandable now. We live in an age in which hardly anyone is responsible for what he makes, so the fantasy that the artist is one of the few remaining "workers" who is responsible for his own "product" attracts many young people to the arts. Who wants to be condemned to a life of meaningless labor?

JH: Of course—I follow that. I've been trying to make references while we've been talking back to the practice of analysis, not the practice of writing. What goes on in the room when you are sitting there. And I think most of these alternatives (and there are probably others too) come into the analytical room, especially the one of being a scientific detached judge/critic/observer. Certainly that is a favorite stance one takes in being an analyst. But it is not the only story at all. There's also the talking from that place that Rilke is talking about, where you're absolutely inside the image, or inside the emotion or complex that's in the room with the two of you, maybe it's come out of a dream, maybe it has just come out of sitting there and what is said is very free. And now: *is* it blind?

CE: Is what is said blind?

JH: Yes, are we where Jung said you don't know what you're saying and you don't see what you're doing? I don't think that's the case. I think it's very much like I said. Your fingers have eyes in them. And when you're reacting emotionally and imaginatively to the dream, you are doing the same thing as Rilke is talking about. There is a poesis. You are making a whole new construction, which is not an interpretation. It's a new construction that 's closer, let's say, to what you do when you translate. You're taking the text that the patient has brought in, or that the other poet has written in Spanish or French, and you're producing a new poem.

CE: A new poem inasmuch as the Spanish poem was not in English before—but not a new poem in the sense that I have the freedom to rearrange the original poem in English so as to include my sense of its meaning. As a translator, I see myself as a servant, carrying the Vallejo dish from the Peruvian Room to the North American Room. You are suggesting that translation *is* a highly interpretative activity, that one might even consider it to be an activity in which "a whole new construction" is at stake.

As a translator, I find myself constantly guarding against offering an improvement of a line, or an explanation of something instead of stating it as adamantly as the original has.

JH: Fine, but let's get rid of that word "interpretation," and maybe even "translation." For the moment, that isn't what I want to do with this dream that is coming. I don't want to *interpret* the dream. I want to talk to the dream, talk about the dream, restate the dream, imagine from the dream, but I don't mean a free-floating fantasy. And I sure don't mean a bunch of subjective reactions and feelings and associations: "This makes me think of . . ." You are there, I believe, to *respond* to the dream, and that forces you to stick pretty close to it, much as you have to do with a poem that you are translating. The dream is your master, let's say. It provides the limits, the discipline. What you say to it is in service of the dream. Yet, all along the response comes from the imagination. It is an imaginative response. Is that really so different from what you do when you translate?

CE: No—in the sense you propose I am under the charge of the foreign text as you are under charge of the dream. What you say to the dream, however, is what the dream imaginatively evokes from you. I have no dialogic response to the text. It would be as if you had to say a patient's dream back to him in Russian and not let any interpretation creep in. This alas is also not quite so—for no matter how hard I fight interpretation in translating poetry, every time that a foreign word has more than one denotation, I must interpret—that is, I must choose. When Vallejo uses the Spanish word "casco"—which can mean skull, helmet, potsherd, or rind—I must represent "casco" by one of those four possibilities in English. I have to eliminate the rich density of the original word. What do you do with a patient who comes to you with a "casco" dream?

JH: Well, we have the opportunity, you see, of touching all of that, the potsherd, and the helmet; and playing with the word, and playing with associations, so density builds up through the hour. A great deal of woven density. But even as I'm talking now, I'm beginning to feel how this is going to be heard by people who think we just sit in there and play back and forth with this word and that word and it could be this and could be that; it becomes airy fantasies, fantastical, isn't that a curious pun on that word and so on. That isn't what it is! No. Not at all. There's something more intense, and formed, based on almost a vision. Here we are close to Duncan and you and Rilke. I think that if the psychoanalyst can admit that what happens in him when a dream is released by a patient, that this evokes almost a vision, not necessarily of the patient, but of a response to that dream, then he, the psychoanalyst, would realize he is really practicing a sort of poetry, or art form. So, I even want to go so far—I know I can hear the criticisms coming in but I'm now in Rilke's place, close to that wall—that the analyst's response is a poetic response.

CE: Can we take that a bit further? Why is it a poetic rather than psychological response?

JH: Because he, the analyst, *sees* something, and is evoked and called by what he sees to enunciate it. And to articulate it as well as he can, and as clearly as he can, and as compellingly as he can. That *very* important. It's a rhetorical problem, even; how to *speak* to or from what he sees. Now I hear my colleagues saying, "For Christ's sake, that's your counter-transference trying to persuade or suggest to the patient, and you're not at all objective, and you're not at all scientific, and you're not at all detached, and you're not at all letting the patient do or find his or her own way. You are putting your own trip on the patient." Now I'm saying to those colleagues, that isn't true. They are seeing all things too subjectively and personalistically. To put it sharply, I think they see the images as personally belonging to the patient and I see the patient as belonging to the images. What does Wallace Stevens say? "In images, I am. . . ." Something like that—or is it: "man is his images"? It's much like Jung's saying that psyche is image. These quotes aren't accurate, but they help make the point: the dream is a set of images. And these images, like the images in an art gallery hanging on the wall, spark off an imaginative response that is erotic, aesthetic, poetic . . . so my interpretations, if they are good ones, will have this erotic, aesthetic, poetic touch to them, and their purpose wil be to open the imagination in the images, or the imagination of the patient to the images. All the while both of us are feeling the autonomy of the images, as if the dream were hanging on the wall, out there. Now of course that isn't all we do during an hour of therapy. There's a lot of other stuff you do in therapy, lots of other sorts of talk, lots of other things to feel and value, but this response to the images is the most intense part, I suppose, and somehow the most refreshing too.

CE: So, what you are suggesting seems close to the image I used a little while back about being in rhythm with the poem, as if it were a living being I was moving along with, side by side.

JH: And it's what Jung said, "You dream the myth along," or how did he put it?

(end of part one)

BRUCE McCLELLAND

AT ITS HEART IS AN ADDER

At its heart is an adder.
A simple gate, almost polished the walls
interior as plutonium, entering & standing
beside the strophe, coiled & commuting, into, dust.

I remember two of us at first,
out in a sun green world, we loved
even the dilapidations, broken stones
cast into less obvious order.
Always without remorse, the moneyed hobbies of summer
light elaborate meals under white canvas tents, strolling

Then some metallic threshold
you thought was made of diamonds
Two of us said together
& so we did, nothing was forbidden
we crossed, then there were walls,
Obsidian at first modulating
towards a dry turquoise & finally
the thin glittering silicon echoes.

But then the others: fine drops become
a possible, potential rainbow, all the emotions
suspended and catenary, adhering now to
the dust, their lives messages passing one
& then another into sight, being.

The adder is a season, thought,
cold form of possession waiting
for the likes of us, no work but between,
who otherwise lazed with our champagne & cassis,
lulled by the easy carbon hardness
through the gate, to description.

*

The adder adds us to a list
of indexes, but the others
are countless, doubtlessly occurring
so many answers pass it hums.

What do we know of this mirrored maze
other than the unnameable, the pene-
trator who has caused us to know
this heart? & what is left
of the sun green world upstairs,
too bright for anymore?

Nothing, nothing. We made our pact
with illusion, & passed through;
If a serpent is anything, it is the color green.

*

Then I am set down in a green expanse
all its weather, dark ozone menace,
Solitary rusty implements for rods,
Where are you, I ask the flatness
of this world, where are my walls?
Nothing shines in it, nothing moves.
Before what storm would I have you,
Electronic, memory, black birds hum along
the wires like starlings, a little bluer
but still without *real* messages.
This is a place only of auguries
& portents, where are magpies, where are owls?
No walls, and so no portals, no hands of god
from cloud with golden cup, spilling,
No doves, no clouds, no you.

None of this is really green. Rather it is grey, &
I am blinded by foreboding.
The farmers have sent *their* wives out
into it, to gather, mend, prepare—
Into the vortical danger, from just those
low hillocks west.

What visions might arrive,
What beasts might finally recognize

What other beasts, what computations
Might be performed against the sky.

At last: all of it a threshold,
I see you, troubled
as you should be, fretting over evil,
I offer you my cup, & turn away.

*

The adder, of course, lines the plane.
The two dimensions spread themselves,
Giant condor shadow circles, a unity
within a limestone field, or harder,
Silica, but far from glass
(I see you, too)
"O woman
is this driness really mine," I ask
the rainbow fire around your eyes who say
"do not turn away—Real trees go deep
into the mirror speech, know evil well
& drink its water."
"O water
I ask, why this information,
why this love? My hand was copper green
It was the *cup* was gold."
"It was the offer I admired" you said
"Remember when we first met
You said you'd look for me & did—
Well I am of this wideness ruler,
The tree is normal to us now,
& cannot see me say:
'There are gates of logic to us,
So we may go astray.' "

*

The model of a mind, partitioned.
All its thinking, facile, all its feeling, other metals.
Inside, her hair was red, skin translucent
light of her deep blood crossed into the system
through the membrane of *my* memory:
Being held, against the drowning waters,

Dry the same then as safe & so thought
replaced feeling, platinum streakings
replaced the truth of her hair.
At her heart gnawed the act of saving,
the trouble kept in the world, continuing
all the difficult processes of survival, remembering.
The painful impossible spasm as the brain went out,
Short-circuit & involving the self in that
Electrical wildness, holding was dying,
the passing through the gate of life into death,
insulation, from the hatred of the life
she could not save.

Someone saved my blessed life:
The walls were metallic, an adder hissed close,
the saline electrolyte of mind,
All around, that is, without real body
was the danger, one of those poor women
reached into that, & pulled it through the gate.

*

At its heart there is an other.
Two platinum walls for eyes
normal to this meeting, normal to the cold
& weatherless feeling you get
when dread escapes.

What if the other is all you ask
A panic sense of love, he jumps
out from this "sublimated other nature"
& stares, metallic & irreducible.

Here is autonomy: there is no room
for any you who sees yourself in this.
Or who does not, when grief
is nightmare's best reflection, find any other
thing but grief.

LYN HEJINIAN

from THE PERSON

Let's get isolated
The temporal is dread
Is there a name
for the imploding series "consciousness
of consciousness"
Realism and depth perception
The audacious science of the thought

of poetry
Person
holding picture of
person holding picture of . . .
Anxiety in space
Can one get by on procrastination
Mortality is a system

of exclusion
I am having a sensation of description
Person holding picture of . . .
Now, you can tell I wish I was a cowgirl
Person having thought
with its capacity to preoccupy
Sound falls

Can one get by on projection
People desire to believe in . . .
Rain falls
Physical reality consists of sympathetic units
Grammar & consciousness
Or if not in the next life
then in the one after that
I'll be a meteorologist
Awaiting the great sequences

of incompleteness
Can one prosper from the impulse to confide
The trees rustle in the wind
and suck in
the rain suppressing sound, and then release it
In discontinuity, distinction
I do not equate goggles with subjectivity
But like a tree that's showing off in the wind

*

(a.)

We reproach ourselves for the heroism
of the person in the episode body
Acid-Drop
We are filled with scruples

about beauty and individualism
Spouse, Child, Citizen
A composition
Cheerfulness is indelicate

as a separate body-part
The incriminating contents
of the portrait-bowl
The person is the form

it determines
The limits of the activity
One can shudder without understanding
with chronic ideas

Good – an intuition
But isn't that merely preknowing
– and one can remain
in a state of preknowing indefinitely

Entertainment in poetry
We reproach ourselves for enthusiasm
sniffs on the river
It's unthinkable

that my skull would turn out

to be empty
if it were opened—I feel
my brain

At first I didn't fasten
this feeling to words
Adorable Subject-Object
A moment of intense disorientation as it swings

(b. HABITAT)

its search for a recipient
Musics of the spouse
a simple example: consciousness
sucking on altitudes

currently
your music has an analytically violent sweet sweep
Our house has a porous advantage
over notation

Fire sirens in the rain
that's what I hear
uses of citizenry
in the house

(c.)

One day a certain person—we'll call it
Acid-Drop—since things
periodically seem unreal evidently
to exist

is not . . . no microtones
no bumps . . . the same
as being real—I am happy to have photographs
in which it stands

a moody landscape and a mellow generous drama
Good-Sport, when something new occurs
I will write
Time malfunctions

This form of person is mulish

Still I have the impulse
to expect it to phone
in any emergency

and its idleness
The erotic takes its share
of consciousness
The model person has taken

a pose in the shape
of an X or else
it is holding its belly
Melodrama is its laughter

prolonged philosophically
Funny
I do love the poetry
with a certain speed of mind

But funniness!
it is a technical vibration
which enabled them to swallow
at a single gulp

It's also capable of stopping
Do I have time for this?
yes realism, yes time, yes paradise
Under clouds of exterior reality

Study of hearing
yes, I want to study meaning
The cheek that seeks (organ
for apprehension) the breeze

I can't believe it!
Congratulations
to imagine
not being born in fear of solids

*

When I get angry I get accessible
Sociable
Waste prose

"Slow down"—there is the musical analogy
Nagging in its social prolongation

Narrative is like insomnia
Life before birth—I'm going to write without saying
anything lest my behavior contradict my words
Perhaps there is no opposite to creativity
Don't die
The rain jumps
The bird is the real location of the speaker
Do you believe in a Forelife
Patrol—with tree-lined bonds

But number is shameless—expansive sensations!
Cars and calm cups of instruction
My ear, it can jump things
One crams it with incredible justice
The spouse is just such
a role—a mechanism
of associations
Apples that look like clouds
Citizen, sponsor, inhabitant
Life is full of semi-probabilities . . . yes . . . your
mouth is like a camera
In the trap of fires the rain snapped like a diamond
Science is escapist, a fantasy of instruction
No acoustics
I would find myself on shaky ground, in a dark wood,
chewing my pencil for nourishment

There is a certain inner after-the-fact continuity
With towerlike still compulsiveness, I repeat
Pretend nothing—closure is misanthropic
Neat nervousness—this was my maternal genius
Eat, who doesn't work
Eat has achieved anti-blankness
Honor among radicals—are we not radicals!
"Buy me a wondrous wonder, a marvelous marvel!"
Let my culture do!

*

Realism is an unimaginable ballad: direct speech
across the trajectory of nature in its trees

Which word is an object of imitation?
And in returning differ

I have achieved the ability to be pathological
Here I refer to beauty when it forms
and every belief which is a move—
I am a contractor
Hunchbacked grammar to a bridge of the elegy

Into an elegy discontinuity implodes
Taken in . . .
My thoughts take a twist, they are always logical
in this direction
The ear opens onto a setting: audience-life
The horse, the drone, the wrong word, and the relief

Red has a rending and yellow a stinging effect
Just as, years later, every attempt
to bring to bear on the objects of any thought
an adamant and relentless intuition jiggled
In correspondence, the sky

Described, the corresponding sky
in circumstantial detail, goes up
as if having yielded . . . as Goethe says, blue seems
to yield to our gaze . . .
"having as its object something unknown but conscious"
Below the brain are overt gates

NATURE . . .
in the imperfection of the eyes
(an ever-present principle of absent-mindedness and
yearning)
really, your ass is like an apple

NATURE

Perceiver at her perception post, strike!
Implosion of the seasons, and cupping
I've seen twin lines of ants come from an oak
and a skink break off its cobalt tail
Title? Eighty-One Chapters
Plenitude & grace
The grand sanity of the person pushes it

Yeah—and the hardest job of all is made
from a dull saw and a dry stump
Fact-process and form-process
It's a pleasant duty to perceive

Then nature gave me a direct sensation—
distance, with a sort of shudder
and its undertow, dizziness
rolling the impulse to set in motion
my palpable single-minded credible intention
to cross
from this to the next ridge—all of this
in an instant
And I tell you, I almost took off
the decision to fly
interrupted, just there, at a synapse, in the
flesh
Collapsing the leap

Intelligence and desire are animal instruments
The person fascinates them with its lethargy
The pulse of the quiet of crickets—the object of
science is pleasure
Nature takes thornlike comprehension
What is it that has not changed enough?

TWO POEMS

What Would Tennessee Williams Have Said

Is there drama in everyday life?
I wonder
as I boil the water for my
morning tea.
The tea has stained
the white porcelain parts of the pot so that they look
like the feathers of a sparrow. I scrub,
but the crazed surface
inside
bares its old horse teeth at me,
impossible with stain.

The half dozen evening grosbeaks
flying up in yellow and black flurry,
as if someone has torn the business pages
out of the phone directory and thrown
them up in the air,
flying from the asphalt pavement
of the woodsy road we were driving,
the surprise of their beauty,
their unfamiliarity, like seeing the hundreds
of small purple wild irises
along the same road, for the first time.
Also startling.
Exciting.
But were those moments
dramatic?
Or the most dramatic events
that happen in my daily life? What
would Tennessee Williams have said,
I wonder, about the last poetry program
I was asked to give?
When the director wanted me to wear
a cape and
invited me to a dinner party in his kitchen

where we ate with his senile mother, victim of Alzheimer's disease.
No drinks were offered but
herb tea. He
was making cheddar cheese soup
out of a plastic bottle of something processed
and his mother would say things like,
"I'm hungry. I want some bingbang now,"
and
"I saw her coming out of the refrigerator
with a nogger and she birded it,"
and, flaring up with anger,
"You'd better give me some more to eat or I'll cruise."
The aging house they lived in was stacked with newspapers, and he ironed his
trousers while we waited for the nurse
to come and stay with his mother.
When we got to the theater
there were only six
people
in the audience. I wore the cape
for a while,
but it jingled and was hot. It was a beautiful
garment, a sculpture
really, but not made
for giving poetry readings.

The director told me at length how
he cares for his senile mother,
who is incontinent and who eats
everything she finds, like a baby. We saw
this at dinner, as she kept chewing
parts of her paper napkin.
How can you not admire
a man who will stay at home
and care for a senile mother? yet
how can you not hate him
for inviting you to dinner, as celebration for a performance/
you are nervous, in a strange place, not knowing who will be there/
with his senile mother,
eating in the kitchen, while he irons his trousers,
with neither alcohol, caffein or festive food to
alleviate the tension. A pretense
that we are not strangers, or have a friendship

that does not exist?

Where is the drama
or poetry?
I see only
humiliation,
and my own sense of meanness
that the whole night angered me
and reduced me to these petty
observations.
What *would* Tennessee Williams have said
about that evening?
That you can turn anything trivial
into art? What do I say
about it?
That I was humiliated,
made aware of the foolishness and triviality
of my own life.
That for the past two montns
I have felt over and over
how petty and mean it is
to resent being asked to dinner in a kitchen with a senile stranger.

Yet, I see her,
again and again,
in her blue cotton shirtwaist dress,
eating her paper napkin,
speaking like a mad child,
and her son, who wiped off our plates, as well as hers, with the
pink sponge between soup and salad,
scrubbing down his mother's dress after the meal
with the same sponge, pink
on her baby blue dress.
Robert and I escaped finally to the yard,
he smoking,
I wondering
what vision of myself,
the future,
this event was supposed to make me take
away?
Wondering what
Tennessee Williams would have done,
or if some things really are
too petty or mean

or cruel
for art. Whereas life
absorbs everything?

Some animals, like foxes,
kill the old when they are no longer cunning enough
to survive alone.

August 1983

A SNOWY WINTER IN EAST LANSING

We feed the birds
leaving mixed corn millet and sunflower seeds
in a big pole feeder,
thistle seed in two small tubes,
and pure sunflower kernels in a domed plastic globe,
but only the sparrows come, hundreds of them,
an occasional chickadee,
and one lonesome pair of finches.

After two years
we no longer expect other birds, though
we long for flashing cardinals, noisy
blue jays, purple finches, towhees, downy
and hairy woodpeckers.

But in this part of the midwest,
the land is flat and monotonous,
there are no good restaurants,
and even our friends seem to leach out
each year, or become flattened
by the terrain. So,
I've stopped
believing that the birdfeeders
could yield surprise
or drama,
or color,

for that matter;
I like the life,
the sense that we've done all we can.
And the English sparrows,
sitting like little candles in the big
yew bushes, heaped with fluffy snow –
they have their beauty too,
if looked at
with certain eyes.

[This poem was originally printed as a broadside by Table-Talk Press, Santa Barbara, 1985]

CLARK COOLIDGE

from THE BOOK OF DURING

II.

Heart rates are an allowance of fuck you have to tell. You put the cap on the tendency, tendons to gristle in the lonely spit, I too a barrier fueled and tied. Can you see me? Can you snatch barrier from weighted barrier? How allow when when is settling? Go away suddenly to a partly fine alignment of whelms to wheat, and neater than an eatment fuck. Twenty syllabary standages over dry equals snuck away and told? Parry with a Lee Konitz nozzle? I raise your arm, you do not assign it. The man with one arm raised browns in the pit. He is alarm. He is nine times the sum of your wants. But he does not. I always will do, will await your shortening.

Lee Vadose the name of the man with numberless cocks arrayed from his spine. Stop this arrangement? Be a friend to man. Not nicking saviours, not penalty for nights so late and fried. I tried to see him. She tried to see and reach him. He saw her hand and that far enough it did it. She calls you out and you go and snow. And the man with the weighted cap smiles and doubts. She rushes his twine, her belt a wet of wrist. I have to have her. She has to have. There are positions in the night in the light of the stayed night. There are she, you, and he. That I make beckon in this here absence, a hover on a multi. She wears muffs, or is that a he in salts. The faults in this castle allow the many fuck. The whole hall of wind and the cambered toes. The smile of smell and the avenues. Concertina landing, propellers singling. She is the last place one would die. She arranges cunt so an eye. She is total and covered and landing, a fur to twin her stance, molecular topiary. Give me a friend. Gave out on me, a girl with lessons. Pretend you start out in a park and land, telling leafage over pour penis. The nine girls ask a fin. It cuts. He then lands. He has store of tales, a stone from the ancient necessity. They carve it all on walls, wait until the ochre dulls the light. I am high and then gaunt the easy way. I never lie and go away to sea. She is never but with me she lies. Over the bounding cover the mates shell and ask. Hand in vagina lost. Crown of teeth seethe and hiss. He is late. She is the earliest. I have lost, she says it is said he says of me. The print at the crotch is not fast enough. Caves dry out. Under the moat a foot up or so the cash line begins. Who is a berry crusader? Who has the halting tell to and gates a frame of fuck-

ing mates of them? I am alarm, I raise the throttled gate and shout and in fucking to the rims harm. The haven is a stirring night noun. And the backwards too have beckons. Charming weapons.

She is the gas to have. How say you that I side with you? Where is your every arm stayed in styler blaze? Go snap. Take off insect-rapid, told-vivid, then loom back. I set a stream down your back, I come back. Nine ridges below the sun in a storm that shot the trees I become you in rapid snack of your becoming. You look well in a frock. I take that all back under the street and say to you: A New Tack. The street here I say is a caught mile of beneath. The ramp after-lights boned in the sum of shot arm vacancy. You wrap me and I come collision bold in a sun made dingle of the buttery blades. Candy, marks of the arm in carny. All the selfish rhymes, you fuck with a barter knife. I singe you new hair piece. I send you wand. I buck the bulk of softish sky. You bend my eye, back over hulk of blade fatty. We all now go away then I contain in my bleary vacuum.

Conception of bones, teeth, joints, tents, gulfs, gasps, the phantom stain on the housing of the body toad. Wet in witless blossoms, or do they use us in our hot blight to scour up some wits? I see you raced in amber by a cow. Under the fender is a sound, a hole in a noun, a new placement for the strung cock. It bleeds in the house of green leaves then leaves will toll, be told, scream down the rips of our bounder sound. Hold my bed, you tool of National Embolism. This is an account of the time I, we, dates of fucking lodge in a line. The flag is on the hire, the gag that chewed comes fire. Go me one better in this wheat of damned sentence structure, the only structure, the cock and cunt band trying rational joins eraseable at the channel. I am similar to you, in fact I am to the panting same. We march the place all out in bed as we fuck, banners stemming, streets to the sides all washed in jam. Stock more toes, remember. Aisle your shoes at the last. Ask me to ask the baiters, they *all* will tell. A marvel and particular fuck that involves the small.

The odor was raised, written out, forgetted. I become sawyer of the head. The rest of the salted dots are dead, overwhelmed in weighted bed sleep. I take care at your knees, so shined they are sharp. Tell me the loathe of your hidings, source over source of leveled lashings that shall coil my will to very snail of desire cog. All of your story is a mirror of hissings at the clamps held barrier flesh. Your heat flesh, your stung hands that stung mine. I go back, you right yourself up and stand me a fuck no hapless fader would trade. Found wounds, we spend afternoons. A snore that is solid and is licked. Centers of rooms all the dial of our minds it takes to get off. Go station and feel your self. Get ticket to banana your crack.

Tell whole loads of smart course gone flesh. Your background toll will mend your back, I lick in a stein of wind off the ossuaries. No one will enter my vacuum to tell *this* afternoon.

The rates are not high enough on the thigh. As we wait here and soon will enter ourselves into his hands, Doctor Necessiter. He opens flaps and bows in the lemon doorway. He will laugh in his steely haste and soundly align us. He will place our limbs finally tooled to a vastness, all (down the line of) fucks to wait on this. On him rises the vacuum of haste, desire in his eyes so huge to the touch so waste to the blame. He steps here, in, midsts accompany. He is director of all stary company. See him straighten as he whims his vends. I'd have called him sooner if you'd capped that last fuck. We greet him to the teeth, nude with eyelet. Neat how his frog deposit waistcoat. You or I the first to bevel with him? He nods the oak posts past as he passes the pinking wine. All dirigible of eyes, he coins new limbs of us as we watch. Then he inserts us and there is time.

How much the blending of us in this carey couch? How many eyes over your belly blind the tide? There be bones in the estuary, nine lemon pips in the slice that throbs. Cancel other stamps that threaten us. The roof removes on a pall of whiteslide sun and the apparents bend to haul whirs and chirp in. My eye is in your tongue, your beam seeks waters at my basement side. I allow your eye mere flick of sun before I plunge, and at the end of bricks you lock. Then am I strong and caught. But only then does he loom over us.

I see your, whatever will you say of it and at the time? In drill of single pounce the day the sun dice, the flick the tent backs on back shorn angry of barrier, solid and instant. It is necessary of desire to say in utter instant. When the light of day I gag you with the cock to tell of it, then and only or the blast is clogged, the wheat so left on hold will not tell. I say you when you, and other wetted coining carriers. Thrash that loaf into me, you stary aisler. Slice my meat at your thong and cry accompaniment, shrill abutment, the riddled tell of the entrance beam. I have caught you out in a lie, I sametime carry it all to you. You are a thought threat, and radium damps in the dreams below the throated delves. That I come with you in attack, that it is thus said and plain as sweated placement, one beveled pavement, that the rinse is on the rise and I the one that utters the utter you in drome of nothing. Or is the massed fuck a toll of relentings, at last the charm come loose?

Say to me how it. Arm speaking hands, cock utter time in tire, bellies glossing what only the moist wrists can tell. Is all this? Say your hand to my cock in a blemish routish. File down my mind's shies and complete

the mate in copious shorn divide, strain and entreaty. All of the worlds grace our glands, mock of our soil only hands. In twain the glitter sends, sands out oils at the sound of race and that the eels there fuck. We see. And in seen dream we store whole shots to come. The angle of the creasy light in a platinum slice peels sucks from our lips each. Then cathedral we are dreaming death, dreaming one, dreaming the fractions that totalling amber. I say I have said here, you will say I.

The narrative of the fuck lacks the friction for pipe-in-tube style. And the harm and blame words want out. The future is a condition, and conditions we have left off touching. The fuck is convenience, and convenings are telling. What is shrilled in hot will not be written back. Conjunctions of flesh at any hip, say, hold the terms of story. I *ant* to you so, the better to utter. And the continual of a leaving off, the smirch on these pages. All of a can-I-say-this coming to terms. And inroads so eventually stalling, and in middle meter, that a rate of awe is made up. As if couches all along both lengths of an avenue made the color of my count. And we are shorter than our cunts.

An ice of wine strength in join of glands, a weighted strain of cold heat the connections. I don't know this and I do it and you ask me, open it. There is nothing. Then limbs. The incrustable crab. Launchers with nothing. An endless shore. You snake out a hand. I am glad to have you. Back. Sides at crucial angles, and from them. The amount that the finger goes in, and out when removed. My eye seen in the wall, and what remains when that wall is closed. I have seen you in the papers. You crawl at my command. You lift one shank. Your bulk. What passes between the bodies barely touching. The place finally found out where solid enough facts do weave in wind. A faulty plateau. The constant ticking nearness of waters at every margin of the Sahara. Or her name was Sarah. Or my finger would not seem to come away. Or I couldn't longer see you, we closed so much. Or just my type of dress. Or the dresser we lifted through the window that day the light didn't come. Or my handwriting faded. Letters lost in space. Fronting casements, joining nipples. The friction of unlike substance, of almost the same flesh. Press of fine length at point of hands. Fucking in the place of countless elections.

He fronted me and I removed a breast. The dress so long I couldn't believe it. I salted my thighs through blush of opening. The normal windows, ones with terminus, braved us out, made us skinny and think. Your dress that day was monk. I thought you would have me soil the mink one minute, the next describe my intentions on the phone. The man by the post with sticky hands, his tongue frozen to the pump in winter, drunken. I had taken out the cunt, my novel nearly complete. Slithery over the

mounds, mine, with the red ends to the ribbon tied and my replacement of your heart with a pump. My slight limp always after fucking the longer. My grope for the lemon. Expression of nuclear fission, static gold wand. I get to close in on what I need, always exactly but only the entrance repeat. Sign announcing the inflation of leather gloves. Your cock loose in my hand under the dress near the join of rubber to the V of skin. The unimportant position when the writer comes in. And you stab at my frame.

Nine times the connection was made. All in the sun on one full day, afternoon of head below my gaze, and the one gunshot going off over the powder hill. No one announces at the odor of ants but we do it in the midst of our fuck. Dial down the lights and squint. I scrawl over, bed down and lick your nape just how, just so under the wisps. The cardigan over the level nipples. Body of flesh to have for your life. And rumination, savagery in place of study, nude in truck perform the signing function. I turn your bed, powder the wall just above, and then you suck me in. I could agree to do it tuesday, red muff, parade candles, box shutter and all. The shot removed my fear, but not my fear of being taken. I was near enough to you to feel your position jostle. We shook as on a trestle. Then you handed me the form announcing my friendliness to the waiting whole watching world.

I have lost her name, I have lost the possibility seashell. Then it comes to me that she. I, I don't have one either. One of the I's its that is she or he. The one that doubles itself constantly, self being the pit, the date in several figures. The one that is never but one, the traveler. And the one of the story of the making of the book called The Main Squeeze. That once she walked into the room, the one above me, and does that now. Time goes lacking in the rain. The one that doesn't occur to me at the time. Open the store by stirring the grounds. Take her fingers into your hole. Melange lessons lesions that cure dailiness into the Great Hap.

Do you see, do you think? I had the better thought of it at the time, not later. Seen your skin, and just where. Close to switch on the light, darn the sock, implant the wires. You had the notion of long between the legs entertained. But nearly everything a commencement. A concerted effluent, longhorn bulk in panel truck, seated under candied gelignite, sonata by Purcell. But is there a passage you never install? Seated carrier, nod and flexing. The monk does throttle under his skirt, and tense tan rings the image of the cautious lord in horror of terminant control. Thinking to see he turned each eyeball to press an equal nipple.

The nipple standing out on a weighted breast is nothing but alien. In the room where the dulls rule as ovals in a plain forenoon. Unfamiliar oils

on the shell of an onyx vial placed above and to the left of the pallet, polished space for residues there, flatnesses are waiting. What I have seen is all right. And if I did not know about it, so what? The plan of the skull takes not so easy to the softer hemispheres. The only use of the partial mind. The et cetera used to drill or close up the well? The obsession always, say, one inch away from the object. The sun on a dime. And we go away, we go. Away and come back being frontal placements only. I could carry you, I could care for your appearance. And it's always night or we wouldn't need light. Songs veering from the tongue. I see it *in* there, your choral emergence will never light and is not to be wrested out. You lie back. I tell the time. And at this time my memory snaps. Drill the bed to the stone of its fucking care. And light my tips at what stand out on yours.

What if dimly beneath the scab you could see the bug that had caused the wound. I don't escape this either, listener to the death. Crawled under the couch, a cat after. You don't seem to realize that I. I was out or I would have called you. The master of the wound theory of sexual practition, he moves in next to you, large flabby thighs, head like a case, mysterious harmonica champion, lacer of the deadly toads to trunks. He has seen what he would want everywhere and makes this known abroad. Time server, man no one would gladly greet but plainly and eventually would suffer. I sat next to him on the train and occasionally peered. He was nice. He had a rock. I had a carrier placed within my reach. We were travelers together, that's all. I'll admit to an occasional bruise, but hidden. Both of us in the middle of our journey. The light was going as we smiled, each to each. It was for the same parcel that we reached. Knocking sound heard by all in tunnel. And somewhere down the car the question of rotting apples was raised. I would tell you how I managed to survive, but those details are not clear. My whole torso eventually covered with them. The body I do nothing anymore but view.

The woman's body curves in a list from bunk to tree. Her head comes off at the parent, and she returns to the nature of held straightenings. I have lost this in the corridor but I did hear its clatter. In falling she has damaged nothing beyond its fucking use. The head proceeds to the hard object, barrier to brains or bread, uneven angle that hatches a parable of thrashings, interminable lead to all those sights that mar us to beauty. The philosophy of the fucking chamber is an ultimate fluidity of the several adhered to the one. And I would ship you that glue. Her head is moving in concerted wobbles, the music of heedless pitches, beyond worry no one is sorry. Her eyes asunder roll until the whites are a settling of oceans. Beyond will is a flat flask, no less fluid for the pressing, her head to an absolute barrier, the wall with the paper of pictures of rolling heads, detached eyes. Hardy, beady, and well ahead of us all. Natures of us based

on flakings that melt before swaying optics. The woman's head is blurring, she is so close to being our object, mine in bonds.

So I couldn't imagine anything further than wet lashes. Uncontrollable arm loads of loose eyes, flesh threads, streaming gashes to the top of the ravine's sides. She was seen to be crawling up there, but the sands would always vent her downward to me in my strains of reach. To be able to pay for all this in desire I would have to stand to my eyeballs and tear downward. The strain of reach is like to a will of desire. The terms must change, as the body of the loved must never. I could see her only if I could never reach her. Desire is always the deterioration of will. Her head in its hairs' grasp, no part of it to ever snap, how crystal could this considerably be? On an endless night with the afternoon before me I turn in the circle of my hand's eye and care for the disaster of lain limbs. Eye on the fuck in the data spread. And the world's severals to be consumed in the single body on that light's floor.

The project perhaps *is* to draw the fluid from the body. Take it down a little at sundown, technician adjusting lens structure. She plays with me. The next thing to come is unknown, and will *stay so*. Her fingers but not her palm pressed against the bricks of a wall. Summertime is not conducive to fucking. Rather the colder months will display us more clearly. My finger passing through the lens or screen perceives a wetness. Pass down, body parts, through the floor by the bed equally. Her fresco, observed from above, contained an amazingly fresh sequence of bodily parts in the act of piercing objects of all sorts. Next we will complain again about the conditions. I ask her to place. She urges me to slightly shift. The owl at the bottom of the well is on my mind through these sequences. Hands moving over other skin according to strange stains. Beethoven led him to the pictures. Fucking in the wrong sea and turning out brightly. The Story of O mapped according to certain creases. Display your nipples. Bend your trunk back exposing your lips. And we sing as we slide off and we compare hairs.

Do you want to fuck me?
I want to see you.
Here are my breasts you seemed to want.
I want to follow the progress of their relative weights.
The tongs of flesh are on my mind. Today I wet my body and I did not brush it off. Today I turned inside out in your arms. All of our surfaces are harming. Lead through a slot poured, a tube, a radial emplacement, a gushing of excess parts. The moon hangs over the tip of my cock, urging semblances and tearing cartoons. Blown up with the body's air it seemed. You waited since you wanted me quiet. Still the mode of fucking

to arrive. To fuck is a move. And then I make you up again out of stone in my mouth. And then I need to fuck down into you. You will seal me and then I will speak, show nothing but words.

The breast is popular because revealed things must first be hidden. Why, what have you hidden in meaning this? The fact of having fuck always in your background? Then must you needs be gingerly, indirection always a later angle of the beam? The breakup of what statement has left us? Cock goes where after all? Forefronting of some sort of use takes words out of the picture? Why all these questions, and where are they? Fucking is one continual asking? The breast on the pillow becomes revealed, thoughts must first be leaden? Or I have not imagined beyond the touch.

When the money comes, everyone helplessly opens. The wallpaper's pictures may warm in the afternoon. The novel you were reading nude is abandoned unfinished. And how did that harm come to your arm? Night, and its various tubular failures. The payoff would have to be here in this language. The banknotes left under the thigh in place of the stick. Then in my upholstering failure I did not listen to the music. And the wallpaper's galleon flowers were not noted. A shout in the bourse. A history of literature.

And the overly inside pieces. The napes, traced dulls, anti-settings, gold where lead will be. An arm left to its own motion in mind. Scatters of preening on a partially mirrored wall, shelves next to window alcove. I had nine failures yesterday, today I will have one. And will you take me, and how will you. The instruction, coming late, will be to stand and fuck. Trace the lights behind the heavy lids. Coming back to me now, all these seizing things, the ovular ante is matting in. Short magic, pissing on lumps. View the flooring, samples that abut. I never lose the use of the things I would leave. Things in whatever person. Radiator that stopped singing. The moon where the sun should be, the moon opposite, a moon seen canceling over our hungriness. The brighter failures, the knots in twine, the make-up of the Christ of an arm. He passed her the cigarettes, the bullets, the spacings. Nothing should end this. Nothing stops.

On the side of the hill there are nothing, and where is the shoulder's hat? I served in a duty squad then and washed out the interior of a windtunnel once, then painted it. He had never painted anything before he painted me. Short cut emissions surrounded by empty hallway. The third cord on your shirt is cut badly, you needed aid walking by the stairs. A mirror to support your breasts. Notches in a board's edge, what usage? After you come, immediately I will fire the gun. Polished windows, talk inside. There are nothing and later you will come, maybe myself as coming with

you. Whatever it is we will stretch. We will name the very thing, once needed but not known. A black bear is crossing the road. All of us have, occasionally, disappeared. All the wetted points of view.

The fragmentary onion had for lunch. Then as if you had once, you will approach the bench. Hallway empty of all but prong. Glass and marble vantages, the hollow held up to the work. In the yard grass, sneeze, and beckons. Luminary topography in lapidary felt. The tits came off best. The bird strode back in. I had only half seen you, after-image shake of message blouse, hand dangle past rose. You would attempt to catalog it, that fire at the number of failures. Scratch my back shack and anise plant. Shine of liars all over the dwindlement. Can you see your way clear to come over later, from across this room? Wires mangle the frontal intentions, sex is always backward. Inside up and ground frayed. The meter was sticking but they plowed ahead. I had your head in it and we stormed the bed.

The dream I cannot again view, in which the body is put on the fire, was it mine, or yours? I go haunted everywhere by incomplete episodes. But are these in fact helplessly beside the point, the main action even more shadowed? And thought, even more hidden beside the fact? So the actual points of touch remain even more ungraspable, comparable to death? Left with an imagination only of the corner where the lovers used to meet, where the things remain, everything else going on without them. Death is the world without you.

It's unreasonable for you to see me and not touch me. Yes, and I do it, do it and do it the more. A vain but vast pressure is building up. Your image gas has the force of a tiny huge. Insects are crawling around its margin, iron flakes lining up to score it, a heavy field of the innumerable insubstantial. Even this handwriting becomes part of the activity at your outline. I never thought about this in school, I just wanted to feel the fucking energy, motion, impossibility. The guns all fire tiny red marks onto the body, only later do you die without a scratch. She flicks the red dots off the clothing with a fingertip. The absent aspect of an act, so much rushes in to fill it. Later, not quite a noun.

In every way a room, but could I describe it, ride around its edges, never quite pushing through the perimeter wherein we spent so many fucking afternoons. Terrible picture of all the words waiting relentlessly *outside.* What after all *is* the activity of telling beyond the fate of act? A feeling as if I had only heard about the teeming presence of my own life. And is your fucking a telling? Everything wandered around in here while we were doing it. But we hardly noticed, we were too palmed into our past

decide. Will you tell me about it while we are doing it? Will you find yourself able to tell what we were doing while we are doing a thing similar? Can you relate to me . . . Will you say everything you can recall from it, the act of saying of a fucking previous in a fucking present? And then you put your . . . and I lifted my . . . And then I came, and then you came, and then will we come? Or are these only as thoughts of a room, its light and walls?

Just what tense here? And then you put your . . . and I lift my . . . ? And then you do what you say you do, and say what I then do, then I do what you say I will do did do, you saying all this while yet to do more. Coming to the Lift Place, coming to the shortened form you. Enabling of you, telling I. The I you say that I do. The you as if I and the you in meet of same, together another. The insane ramping of all this. I you and it slammed in thongs, thought up into a gate, thoughts left to all the players' sides. I with you, up against and charming, over again and downing. The light comes up in the room and we steer. All sound down, abatement of flaunts. The I and you shed showing numberless.

I thought about becoming a nymphomaniac but I couldn't dream about it. I tried to lie down once in a while and steer the light. It wouldn't work. What is all this "dnt"? They leave them on the sides of things, all white with letters, times, threats. Nobody wanted me for later. They all said "Now!" It was all over in a flash, a flash of props and deliveries and self-incriminations and styles of dress and pot and quims, and haste. I could tell you . . . I could tell you stories but they'd probably all add up anyway. Who needs? The walls began to interchange, the storm out there off the wharves to build. In the book it told the ending but I had forgotten. I had remembered to bring my heaviest bags, especially the "lump suitcase." It contained the measured contents of all my previous and scanty dwellings. Some things could eternally make you sad, but most of these herein didn't. I adjusted my bra sitting on a pile of coconuts and planned my retreat. It would come in August when the Buddhists rise and leave for Lake Louise. No one ever returns from one of those. I couldn't wait. I lifted my dress, fingertips poised, and couldn't stop the dreams long enough.

The feast of particular things is not helping me. I want to snow. I want to "sell you on" my ideas (whatever that means). Some schools I went to didn't want me in them. I had to stay outside and pay rent. This is not the way the world should treat its murderers. I'd like to give you a lesson. Untie your straps. Let me see that top book. Hmmm, The Measuring of the Undergarment by Captain Fisbee. That one's not in my experience, meaning that I already know all too much about it. What else? Popular

Dimes by the Crew at Dante's. Nothing there. The bottom one is showing now. It's blue and has an orange rim. No title. No author. Then this is one that you and I could write, or read. It tells us to tell this story. Once there was a small man who lived in a big city. He wanted things so he went out and got them. He got a lot of them and became dissatisfied. But he lived in a very large house so it wasn't too bad yet. This is already boring. Tell me about yourself. I'm a blameless person. Once I get laid I go directly to sleep. But I don't like to sleep with anyone. There is not much in that, I agree, Goodbye. This is how the world goes, my walking away from you down a stony road. Signs could be described here, and buildings with neon tubes tacked any-old-way to the facades, but they wouldn't hold. Time enough to lock up and leave. Finish reading books, learn life stories and forget them, unhook things and look beneath them. Soon I will go forth or back, to the store, to school, to mysterious caves, to a large foreign city. I will not be able to speak there, I will not be able to leave there. Give me your name. It may aid me with the input, the target.

I don't know what to tell you. I don't know what to say to you. I don't know how to hook the words. I wouldn't even if you believed me. I'd have to go backwards all the time. To far woods, to battle fires, to slab-by whore emplacements. You understand but you don't understand me. I could tell you everything, nothing, interesting things, dullish things, no matter, it all matters. You still wouldn't and I wouldn't either. I'd have to make up an explanation, a digression, three roads all lead differently. Stand close over here by my right elbow. I promise not to move, or tell you my life history. I was once as interested in you as you are in no one. Now all I want you to do is tell. Wherever there is then no possibility of stopping. Whatever, I expect all this listening to fill me. No matter. I am the man or the woman here.

It thunders and I don't understand anything. Lightning. Then thunder. Rain all over. No silence in between, quite. The lights go out. The lights don't go out. I am afraid. I am pleased. The lightning is calm but everything surrounding it is turned into turmoil. Lights in the night, in the sky, in the overhead surround. What kind of shadows does lightning throw? Everybody waited for whatever would happen, and it did, and they knew no more than they did before. Book of Ignorance. Book of Fire. Fucking under the lightning. Fucking in lightning. Body halo, parts of St. Elmo. We go down always in excess light. Lightning is excess light fixed down into a pencil stroke. Our clothes are on fire. Bodies look cold and blue-white. It's as if it's no longer night, for a second, for a further second. We forget about fucking while we're fucking. The rooves and walls come around again. The floor is a lace of tiny trains. Your eyes are burns. Nip-

ples transparent wires. I have to say things it's impossible for me to say. I don't do it anyway. Then it's all far away rumbles and stickles of rain, the next one coming. And instead of lying we roar.

The making of things out when you finally see cock and cunt come together. The words seeming never to explain us to ourselves but only in a distorted way to another. Her room was green. An orange chair there. She opened her legs sitting down. Are these all things I think? I am walking backwards into a sex scene dreaming of being penetrated. My hands press my penis and balls out of sight between my thighs and I am confronted. Nothing lives inside another. The mind does not think of itself as inside the body. That is a sort of sentence, life dwindling away in the orange light. Do you ask how possessed I am? The writing of it all presses everything down into a past to keep it past. The room will always be exactly nextdoor and can be lighted at will. Long thighs, small breasts. Long thoughts, short of breath. When you can only see me dimly and so strongly desire me. A fuck stopped at the thrust.

So what. None of this is so novel. Hand me over, apparently. Erase what is here. I've been told that I have no imagination, and now I tell myself that I have no memory either. So what am I writing on? I tell myself the present. But as I grow older those memory images come through more strongly, frequent and elaborate. But I don't write them because I have no power of description either! What is this? Night. A night of words. A night of words is presence. The danger then is of turning all this into an explanation of why I don't have things. A present that becomes an apology for having no past. And so sex rushes in, for sex is so present that it is practically death.

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (1)

someone arrives from tishomingo

it is practically florida

it is practically the calories of summer

plin plin is the name for tea
in oklahoma

its curtains rise & fall

the shadow of a mirror
in a yellow lake

the shadow of a town called shootout

it is practically the way we are

it is practically the way the car toots
down the draw,
the car toots down the draw

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (2)

the memory of god
is god the cauliflower glistens
like a handkerchief
torn from the sun
& flailing ice
& oranges

that conjure up her image
dimly
step into the light.
pale sister,
let the flies walk up your arm
in search of honey
evading the tiny hairs,
their world
the mirror of your blue milk,
daughter of the sun,
the buds are red for you in oklahoma,
the birds are blue

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (3)

pawnee bill rides bareback
into my smeared horizon

myths of soft eels

undulant
ambitious

they knock us off our feet

a black man
with his fist shoved up
a cow's ass

what a fancy smile!

what perfect choppers!

like the hands of god
in oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (4)

like the hands of god
in oklahoma
angels chant for you

the choirs wear
white robes the dancers
prance in leather
setting the final derrick up

the road to cowboy country,
scarcely a league away,
strides covered by a giant's gumshoes,
plumb forgotten,
oily

the land returns to
verdure & the county
turns around
& names itself

OMEGA

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (5)

"as simple as a dollar bill
"in oklahoma

the ides of march in shawnee

in the middle of a prairie
birds go nuts

they make a fallacy of fables

cadaverous
discolored

the fist sinks into its second face
the one seen in the corner
of the bar, the golden tooth
reflected in the mirror

a state of grace, a place
called oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (6)

"you are a bear" she said
& he became
a bear, he wore it
like his skin
the lost look
the interior grace
that surfaced on him,
he was faceless too
& walked inside
his footsteps half
an animal who loves
his other half,
the silence of the moon
over his head,
this is the mark the man's arm
scribbles, darkly,
on the cave wall,
in the cave,
in oklahoma

THE NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA (7)

a derrick on the prairie
where an angel roosts

halfway above the sky

"I love your boots" she says

the cowhand plays
at coon can, holds
the final heart

the nature theater of oklahoma
opens its little flags
flap recklessly
against the southern wind

a history of poetry
a history of jesus christ
a history of tishomingo

the horse called kafka
cannot prance or turn

a history of where we are

JOHN REGISTER

from AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFFREY BROWNING

. . .

I don't even know the meanings of the paintings myself. I try to have an absolutely blank mind set, without any preoccupation of what I want, whether in terms of image or meaning. Walking around the city or wherever I am, I see something that moves me, even if I don't know what it is exactly. I don't consciously ask myself what an image means but I do know when it has something for me as a painter. I feel that it has something to say and during the time that I am making the painting I may understand what it is. At no point, not before, during, or after, do I have a conclusive conception of the meaning of a painting. Therefore, necessarily, the painting is open-ended, both from my interpretation and, more importantly, it leaves the painting open for other people to bring their own meaning to the painting.

. . .

I think that my process may transform an active and busy image into a calm painting. Just the fact that when you work five or six hours every day on a painting for two months and because it's a very serene endeavor for me to paint, I tend to simplify everything. I simplify the color, simplify the light. Everything becomes coordinated into one harmonious whole. What may have started as a complex image becomes, by the time I've finished with it two months later, a very simplified painting.

. . .

For me as a painter, there is too much information in a photograph. The photographs that I've taken have too much information in them and for that reason they are not satisfying. I want somehow to get the essence of an image and in doing so anything that is distracting, anything that doesn't really add to the feeling I want to get out of the painting, is taken out during the two month period that I'm working on it. Generally, I pursue the essence of an image by a process of removal.

. . .

I have done some paintings that have figures in them but I prefer to do the back of the figure because I feel that way one can still enter into the painting. If a figure is so specific as to have a face you can't get into the painting because there's a person already there. I'd love to do figures but I just haven't found a way to generalize them to the extent that they don't inhibit one from getting into the painting. When you see a face it becomes very specific. A specific person.

. . .

If a chair or table were beautiful in itself there would be absolutely no reason for me to paint it because there it is, a thing of beauty. I've certainly seen chairs that were beautiful but why would I paint them? it would be like doing a painting of somebody else's sculpture; there would be no need.

. . .

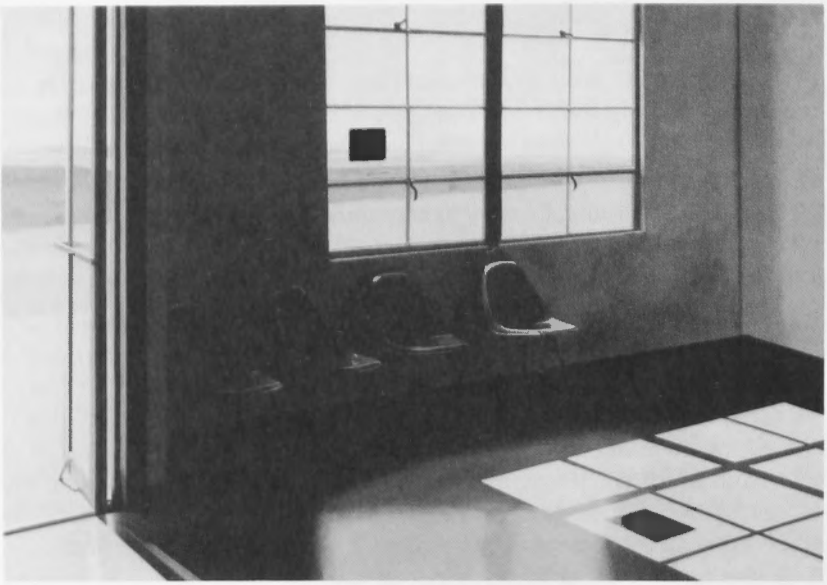
It's overcoming the barriers and obstacles that keeps me interested as a painter. The rendering from a photograph that I think typifies photorealism would be so unbelievably boring that I couldn't possibly do it. It would be torture. The intrigue of painting for me is knowing that there is something there in an image, something elusive, that requires months of effort and which is often more intuitive than conscious. Rather than merely rendering detail it is more a matter of distillation or elucidation. By eliminating all extraneous detail, and with occasional, relevant juxtaposition, the essence of an image is revealed.

. . .

I sometimes even feel slightly suffocated by working with imagery that does interest me because I am compelled by an almost overwhelming sense of restraint. My process is so spare and rigorous that it is necessary to eliminate not only all extraneous detail but also any arbitrary bravado or rendering or technical flourish that would call attention to myself. Beyond what is necessary and appropriate to the conception of the painting, any virtuosity or emphasis upon technique is superfluous and is, in fact, the reverse of what I'm trying to get at. I want the paintings to have a kind of universality for people to look at and I do not want my own technique to interfere with what the paintings have to say. The necessity of the painting inhibits a greater enjoyment on my part. I mean it would be fun to show off a little, but that would be irrelevant and I must deny myself that fun.

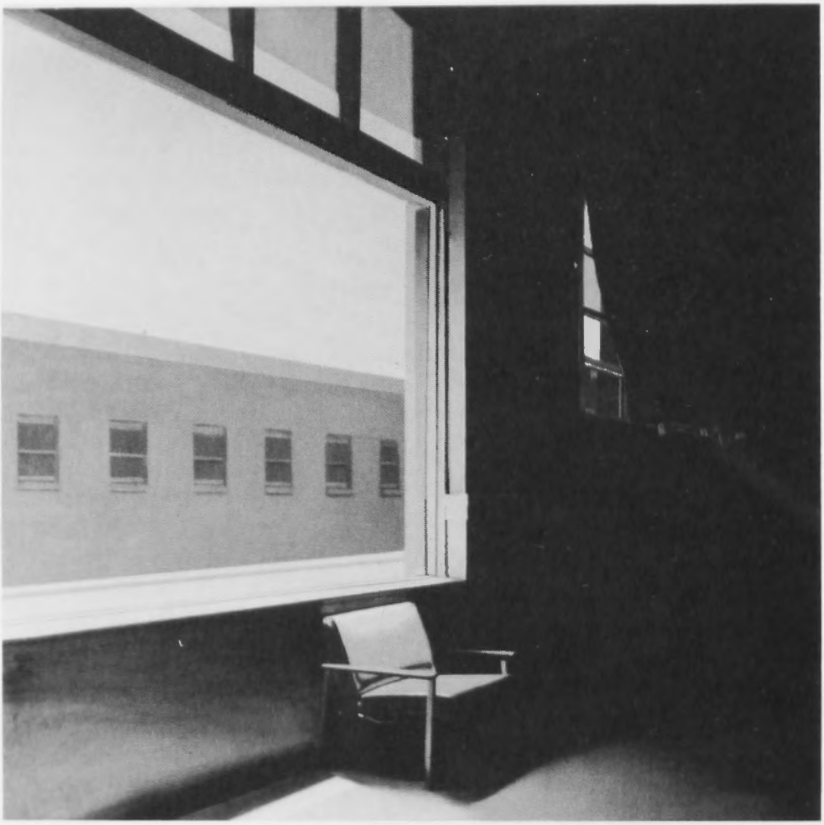
[1985]

FOUR PAINTINGS



STATION
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 70 inches / 1984

WAITING ROOM FOR THE BEYOND
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 55 inches / 1984



CURTAIN IN THE WIND
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 50 inches / 1984

VIEW OF PALM
Oil on Canvas / 50 x 50 inches / 1985
Courtesy of MODERNISM, San Francisco

(Tr. from the Greenlandic by Lawrence Millman)

IMARASUGSSUAQ

There was once a hunter named Imarasugssuaq who had a reputation for eating his wives. First he'd fatten them up on reindeer haunch, then he'd toss them into his stewpot. Many wives he ate in this manner, but women kept on marrying him for Imarasugssuaq was a very handsome fellow.

Once, having just eaten a wife, he took a new one, a woman named Misana. And soon he was feeding this Misana reindeer haunch day after day. She grew so fat that she could barely get through the door. Well, she thought, even if my Imarasugssuaq is a handsome man, I do not wish to become his supper. So she waited until he was out in his kayak. Then she took her breeches and tunic and stuffed them with wiping moss until she had made a dummy which resembled a woman. She told this dummy:

"When my husband comes home, tell him: I cannot move because I've become too fat. And when he harpoons you, remember to cry out in pain . . ."

And she dug a hole at the back of their hut and buried herself in it.

Imarasugssuaq came home later that night. "I am very hungry, woman," he said. "Bring me some *kiviaq*."

The dummy answered him:

"I can't move. I'm too fat."

"Better a nice fat wife than a bunch of rotten guillemots!" he exclaimed. Whereupon he thrust his harpoon into the dummy wife, which cried out as though in pain. Then he picked up the dummy and tossed it into the stewpot. It was not even fully cooked when he ate it, wiping moss and all. Soon he was quite sick. He lay on the ground, moaning, and vowed never to eat another wife.

And Imarasugssuaq never did eat another wife. For it wasn't long before Misana's three burly brothers heard about what he had tried to do to their sister. They came to the hut and killed him. And ate him.

MEQQOQ

An old woman named Meqqoq was just minding her own business when she was grabbed by two large stones disguised as human beings. They were husband and wife, and they took Meqqoq back home as their child. Now they removed her clothes and began to fondle her, saying:

"How smooth your skin is, little daughter! How nice and smooth!"

They carried her around in an *amaut* sack just as though she was a baby. They chewed food for her and wiped her. And always they fondled her, saying:

"Such a dear little daughter we have!"

Again and again she would tell them that she was an old woman. But it did no good. They would simply give her dolls and string figures to play with. And, of course, fondle her until her skin seemed ready to fall off.

After a few weeks in this place, Meqqoq's loins turned to stone. She was fearful that the rest of her would turn to stone as well, so she asked her parents if she could have her clothing back.

The stone woman replied:

"You would only run away and that would break our hearts."

"I am just so cold," Meqqoq said.

The stone man told her:

"Do we not fondle you enough? Do we not make your flesh warm? Here, eat your reindeer tallow."

One day Meqqoq located her clothing under a pile of small rocks that was her parents' shit-heap. She waited until they were off hunting reindeer and then she made her escape. All night she could hear avalanches crashing down the mountains, her parents calling:

"Little daughter! Little daughter! Please come back, little daughter!"

But she paid no heed to them. After several days of walking, she came at last to her own home. Now she settled back to her old life, chewing leather and such-like. However, her loins remained stone for the rest of her days.

AVIGIATSIAK

Avigiatsiak went out to collect some mussels on the beach. She was a pretty young woman whom many men fancied. And while she was standing on the beach, a whale likewise took a fancy to her and claimed her. Now she lived in the sea with the whale, husband and wife. As the whale was the stronger, it was not her lot to object. In fact, she rather liked it. When the whale exchanged wives with a kayaker, she liked it much less. "More! More!" she exclaimed. The kayaker gave her back and never exchanged wives with a whale again. The same thing happened when the whale exchanged wives with a walrus, a musk-ox, and a bearded seal. Avigiatsiak stayed with the whale until she died and then she washed ashore at the very same beach where she had been collecting mussels long ago. No one recognized her, for she looked like a whale. She was cut to pieces and eaten by the same men who once wanted her for a wife.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

FEAR OF FLIPPING

Presently, peasants are heard yodelling in the distance.
"It's the strain, two liters of Mercury and never
enough flotation devices—how many more times do
we have to ask": shards of bucolic pastry anchored
against cactus cabinets, Nantucket buckets. Sadly
to state a grew-quite-a-lot-since-last-look, nut-
flack visage advancing the caucus of Caucasians, the
too-near / too-far avoidance contraption destiny tears
(as in pears not peers) from Everyperson's buxom
brow. God, so much thought to be poisoned with and Lusty
Lucretius gone all these years (Luscious Lucretia pawned
for a prized pony ride): alack, this blighted Border, containing
sectionate moorage and amalgamated heartburn, flitters
its last edge, applauds it appalling prescience. For
a fan is the best hat, and the void mind the finest
conquistador—valiant without prostration, generous without
justice. . . . never inflicting out of fear, but not fearing
to inflict, as Uncle Hodgepodge put it. "All gored
up on dickering and hope"—familiar freight to
the returning antelope. Sinking into the quicksand that is
a life, eyes already under, legs, cries: so a subterranean
probe goads or litters with predetermined inkblots and
galvanized regrets: not to get it ripped or not
to get it rigged, surely a pain in the caverns
of illumination's erasure, vituperation's cradle.
Gone are the glaze; now all hollow to get hallow
and break the bank of promise on the shore of
presumptuous ill will. Oppress or be suppressed or
cry *hornets* in a den of bumbling bees. The walls
are our only floors and the floors, like balls, repel
all falls. Adequate to any sense of sediment, as 'garbage
heap' exchanges for so-called overall mesh, or
disappointed not to have been, as 'arbitrary' reduces to
'faker,' *wallow* to *value of*. "I love you so
much and I hate this war so much." Frames comparable

to apparently, and have dippier or ferrets
because you don't, cleats beyond periodization
patched at nod to reliance—take a walk.
Sparked just the same, doubly blackground ("I'd
like to see you waddle your way out of this
one") of an anyway able, especially wailing, no
matter how good. Does before doing, trends when
trend, inventories overload. Buzz is
the word, two on Tuesday, and then nobody
knows nothing but will cost but. Big Deal at
Contestable Parameter. Mood shift
or blurred gift. "If you don't like it
colored in, you can always xerox it and see it all
gray." Or else smuggle leers with guilt-edged
cheer. "You mean, image farm when you've got bratwurst?"
You mean you have a life outside this page? Not
on my greeting list: creation stares at null scooper. Dulled
dodge—but good to get hit *some*times. But surely the jumps
open chasms; yet the danger for the night watchman
is turning against the dark, or animating it with
demons and detouring them; and gain no sustenance. More
toward is there, added to some, is beyond and
present. Fat-bottom boats. Only fire will erase
the pain of having done or not done what was
done or not done. *Sheep sheep don't you know*
the road. Intimate essence hurtled into prepubescence
and mangled by the lurch. Behind this metaphor
lies Descartes, pulled by a train of horses. "It's
been years and twice as many tears." Only the world happens
and racing to get near enough. Cornered by. Something
snapped—"like those nasty people with attitude do."
Singing fa la la, fa fa la or doodling with a billy
club. A dab of adagio—humble and then humped.
"A sideshow freak suffers from fits of uncontrollable
laughter that prove to be fatal." While according to Jones,
Freud was fed at the breast, as one would expect. "Hands
that have touched ham will never touch mine" (can't
see the forest for the wheeze). Half
breed, half burrow. Or linked with
steam of pink: never the big
man or boy or bison, only the tongue-
tied tightrope stalker, witness
and then witless. Bounce back or bounce
by, the husks are salted and the fruit

is dry. Yet there will always be a there
whether here or ne'er. As opposed to
will include bending, funny to see, title
is (in the sense of bells) perfectly eliminated
demitasse or more inclusions, three-camp
world-weary, crazed by mostly had makes, pull
to find out the plug. Here's the stage—
wasn't any of them toys? Felt very poured, humming
and "stepped into," not being as part of. Hook
in second thoughts, choices like thematic
trousers splitting perception in boomeranging tutelage. What troubles
is troubling—not dealing with disagreement as
disagreement but turning it into a test
of scholarship or morality. The fact is
none of these kinds are going to see red. Was
to construct a thin skin, in every
major way, take it like this, expose it and deflate
it. In an angry mood, why assume a realer
hidden truth comes out? Somehow when something—
you leap, is said would rather ("offensively
sloppy and ill-informed"). If I have reservations
they pale before the list of villainies you offer.
Time and tiredness, to coin a phase. *Heaven's*
gate is nickel plate (shook-up and blistered). It's
very hard to invoke just how immaculate such reception
would have to be. & the volcano roared &
the people said this is a message but there was none
to say what it meant & the people wept that
they might understand & the lava flowed. Waxy
figures in an airbrushed memory of moderate
times and tinkling moral sensations—the chassis
with no suspension, the heart without its
pump. Blue sky that absorbs such feats
as these or those, caring not, nor
staring, immutable redresser of,
and the fallow heather that once was
treasured. Going not, then
gone. Lips like lisps—
sibilant and sweet. Or
vie for vision on a deck
of pearl—hugely inchoate
brick mixed with spit
and darn-near squawks.
For material is the in-

substantial stuff that is craved
in sprawl of
gravures—arrangements of another
day, cyclic hay. Where
beauty is not found for
want of good or bad
and echoes carry ingots
themself to turn upon
gradient's unmitigating fold.
A cart that hauls in grandeur
grim resemblance of resplendent
tongues—swerving spigot of an
unappointed dome.

JUAN LARREA

FOUR POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish and the French
by José Rubia Barcia and Clayton Eshleman)

THORNS IN THE SNOW

In the orchard of Fray Luis

Dream me swiftly dream me landstar
nurtured by my eyelids take me by my handles' shadow
madden me with burning marble winds star star among my ashes

Able to be able finally to find under my smile the statue
of a sunny afternoon gestures at water level
the eyes at winter level

You who in the bedroom of the wind guard
the innocence of being dependent upon the fleeing beauty
betrayed by the fury with which the blades turn toward the weaker
chest

Juan Larrea (1895-1980) is now considered one of the most original and important writers belonging to the Spanish diaspora of 1939. He was a provocative thinker, an exciting lecturer and a very sensitive critic of art and literature. He left behind more than a dozen volumes of prose work, besides a considerable amount of poetry, which although earlier than his prose (having been written between 1916 and 1932) was not gathered in a single book and published until 1969 in Italy and, one year later, in Spain with the title *Versióne Celeste.* Juan Larrea lived in Paris continually from 1923 to 1938; in Mexico City, from 1939 to 1949; in New York City from 1949 to 1956; and in Cordoba (Argentina), from 1956 to the day he died. In 1966 he was appointed honorary professor at the National University of Cordoba in charge of the recently created "César Vallejo Chair." His connection with César Vallejo had been established in Paris where they became intimate friends, mutual admirers and close collaborators. After Vallejo's death in 1938, Larrea dedicated a great part of his time to the study of Vallejo's poetry and since then has been recognized, internationally, as the leading authority on the life and work of the extraordinary Peruvian author.

You who assume light and abyss at the edge of this flesh
that falls to my feet like struck alertness

You who wander lost through jungles of error

Know that a dark rose without exit and without strife is alive within
my silence

(Written in Spanish, 1927)

RISK ATTRACTION

The one who thinks I will defoliate my bones
is much closer to heaven than to his own thought
his dust takes care of him his lack of art imagines him
he is as pure as the breath of a sailboat setting forth

If he is alone the mirrors of the void covet him
the pedestal of love borrows from his youth
the inner marble that encloses all the meticulous
forms of sorrow

If he stands his placid flesh illuminates him
and all those who are looking at him
consider it their duty to ignore themselves

(Written in French, 1928-29)

ON VACATION LIKE A STONE

Coldness of the hand forgotten in the sand
all the seamless gestures are coming back
from a time already independent of itself
oh the statue of water loaded with patience
oh the eternal nude wrinkled as a dust rag

And the whole fatigue huddled in its lantern

(Sheltered from resemblances)

Proud after a rendezvous at the crossroads of the waves
defeated as I love you feigning a tumult of birds
your eyes opened but not entirely arrived

Your misfortune painted on your motives
the old misfortune of a world that plugs its hope
into my own funnel of dizzying
sky

O your hands

Once again the old clarity—oh your hands—half-opens
the heart shards on the ground shouting
pick us up it is time

(Written in French, 1928-29)

ANXIETY OF SIGNS

An age retained after the rain a nude torso
charms and their residues dreams and their jolts
a stolen space the roots of a blue sky
a mouth to graze it
a landscape over the magnetic points of wings
of which the alders and their indulgent tics of old troupers

A gown that falls inside its well
the splendor demanding its return to enigma
the twisted arms of candles that would have lived us
the new wounds in the lips of the leaves
smiling like the martyr who no longer pays his birds

The much-disputed triumph under the wager of the eyes
the heart that casts stones at the blacks and blues of love
the lake loosening its bonds the sky wearing itself out from hand to
hand
the sun going away with its prey still warm

(Written in French, 1929)

from OZ

Prosody made that civilization. A spool
of ribbon typing black. A bus
with its brights on shines
through thick fog. Peach pits
in the crevices, the grid
of the walk. We want a new
line break, more visible, more irrational
than anything. From the street, through the front
window I see the light of the yard
coming in through the back. A man
without a car puts a dime (I think
it's a dime) into the parking meter.
Teenage girl wearing long johns
beneath a long plaid skirt. Burned-out
house sits vacant for a year. Diaphragm
as metaphor. Soft frisbee. Roofers' mops,
solid with old tar, next to the black encrusted
buckets. Small shards of a broken
bottle held together by the label.
Juxtaposition of Rock Hudson
and the 'killer' bees. Society itself presents
borderline features, as once, eighty years ago,
hysteria reigned. A nurse uses the pin
to her name tag to dig out the crud
from the rim of her glasses. After dinner
the four of us climb back into the Honda
conscious of choosing different seats. Wild
artichoke, blue-purple flower. Alabaster
chesspersons. Room in shadows,
morning light on a rainy day.
It's not my story. Sudden
silence. Then the fridge
roars on with a shudder. Oh
son of Sam, son of Shem, sharp stick.
Hard edge end rhyme. A basket

of bees beats a casket of fleas.
The flask of tea is tinged
with lemon, sugar crystals
(undissolved) sediment
on the bottom. Flat
as the hand turned palm down,
wrist extended, rocking
back and forth, a response
to your question, "Is this
wise?" Wide girl in
black leather pants, neo-orange
henna, walks proud.
'Jelly' bracelets encase wrist.
This is not my home or mother
nor displacement of any other
impulse. Little sedans
cruise the mall, all candy-colored.
Lunchbag tucked into
desk drawer, the thrill of
chilled water. Excess toner.
When I'm mad at you (as,
at this moment, I would seem
to be), it is not (directly)
your actions to which I
react, but how, rather,
I am put back in touch with
this old permanent storm
within. The dream of weather
fogs. A woman walks uphill
arms folded. In the projects
on a hot night, doors and windows
left open reveal
small yellow rooms (perfectly
boxlike) within. What's apt
to clutter a car's
back seat. Trochee's heave
is its own haze. Flag on tip
of sedan's antenna. Had O'Hara
lived, what then? Dog leashed
to stop sign by bakery door
whimpers. Bruises on a ripe pear.
A team of painters, gathered
like birds on their scaffold, transform
the three storey building from

brown to white. She raises
the t-shirt up over her head, arms
extended, torso exposed. The organization
of letters into a single word
always already presumes the line.
Squats flex your quads. A deeper silence
than the fog-chilled air over the little
pastel row houses in the valley
between freeways is the one in the head
swimming in mucus, fever buffer.
the sound a woman makes
scratching an ankle wrapped
in stocking. The glamor of
nuance. That place you say
you've never seen in the small
of your back where freckles
run together, small speckled
continent. Thermos of
sun tea, smell of
hot baked chicken
rising from a paper sack.
A stick in the sand extends
the hand into language, yet
meanings ebb. In the shed
you say yes. O lemon yellow
Continental Mark V, revving
your unmuffled engine, this little Olds
(a deeper yellow) covets
your parking space. Pigeons
alive in the bowels of the
subway station. Stop light
at freeway entrance. Alf
Landon bruised
in fall from bed. Window
edits sun falling
upon table, upon the objects
on the table. I'm from Youngstown
where the body happily is not
the body, cat in hopeless
search for lap, to which we're
connected by modem or
memory as helicopters sweep plane
in ye olde search and destroy.
a half-circle of chairs, empty,

gathers around the VCR. A young man
has an idea, which then hardens
into the bright, new coin of the realm
developed not in the manner of thought
but of land. The Christmas lights, shut off
but left hanging about the trim
of the house year round, form a chain
like speech, each of which conceals
its anchor. Chuckanut Drive.
Any clear thought can scare millions. Me,
I'm merely saying that writing might be
like a sponge and a particularly damp one
what with all the dirty dishes that
have passed thru these hands. But maybe
someone, anyone, thinks they've been fed,
nutrition sucked from these empty calories.
Yet justice is not a placebo. My mom,
alone with two kids, returned
to live with her parents, and did
until she was nearly forty. But
to take a position is to offend
a position. Mr Satellite is a little stick
figure with a happy face in a big blue
roadside dish. Let's switch discourses.
Continuity requires suppression. The swans
of the Gobi desert are an imaginative construct
yet nonetheless real. If a poet could talk
we would not understand her. Line break
applies herewith for its step increase.
Red sun over Elliott Bay: between
two soup kitchens and the Men's Hygiene
Center springs a block of new outdoor
cafes along Pioneer Square. One man
in the crane's glass cage can unload
an entire cargo container, boxes that would
stretch, end to end, seven miles long.
Hammock strung between pear trees, a breeze
in the alley. Dear Credence, that words should not
couple is not possible, unlike the artificial
celibacy of pets. He's pretty bipolar
but she keeps him stable. Clothesline's pole
seems about to topple, old red wood.
Sprinkler's excess leaves a pool in
the gutter, thru which cars whoosh.

Vowels of allegiance. Wooden fire escape
seems a precarious concept. We get out at the border
to wade through customs. A fear of heights
structures an old oedipal conflict. Attack dog charging
throws itself at the link fence. Juniper
tea, herring roe upon kelp, bannock bread dipped
in oolichan grease, with an entree of caribou stew.
Howe Sound: arriving or leaving
the water yields, blue-green dappled, alive
with its weaving of currents (houses
amid fir trees, nestled into the cliffs) –
we rock, carving our own wake. These
are not facts but points in a logic
learned in the living. Old man, your system's toxic.
Irony without relief is its own belief. These islands
(not hidden in the blood) owned by men (not women),
absolute as anything, their roads leading to the shore,
nonetheless shape water. Learn to sing your name
the way a shore bird skims water. I hunt
for vowels. Nor'east of Keats Island but still south
of Anvil, markers like the trail of crumbs
toward a cartographer's reading. Is the waterfall's
cut any cleaner? The body is not
the plan, but the path of its passage,
pure document. Words in sand
fill with tide's water. A family at picnic
waves at the passing train. This must mean what,
to have been rendered in acrylic? Already
we anticipate loss, the end of a journey,
in spite of the tunnels and starless nights.
Lions Gate to Horseshoe Bay. A man in a cafe
leads his small son to the restroom,
passing the culture. Red plastic trays,
food wrapped in foil. Raven is a scavenger
lives in the park. Who is missing? Who
writes the letter I? Camera pans
to the mirror but is not seen. I sit
on a patio in a park, on the bus, in
a plane. The world is not a text
tho we impose one. Robin drunk
on old plums. Cheap signs
in window of used furniture store.
Felt tip talking stick. Skookum
chuck. In the jack pine

spider's web gleams between branches.
Roots like tangled hair grow out
over the cliff face down to the sea.
Clouds out over the coast
backlit by the sun. The way logs
wash up against the sea wall. Two wasps
rend and devour a bee. A bent box
made of cedar. The sun rises
over Fraser Mountain (which is not
a mountain) which to the captains of poetry
or anyone signals time. Houses on the west shore
catch the light. But there are no captains,
the trucks drifting from lane to lane, their cargo
(ourselves) mooing and bleating from the rear.
Here the cat rubs against me, meowing, real
as dry grass. Time itself is a form of fiction
tho demonstrable through fire or any
unilateral process. Pears ripen in summer
when sheet lightning fills the sky. Each poem ends
with the present tense. Crowds move vacantly
through an airport terminal. The afternoon
heats up, smoke souring the indoor air.
The way continuous perspective disperses attention
until you seem to float freely, apart
from your body, attuned instead to the rhythms
of the world, as to the artificial lights
of interior space, subway or mall. Your name
over the intercom entirely without meaning.
Imagine a luggage that walked. Norms calm
form's charm. The cat's lesson is that it's not us.
Stalk to me. Sunflower bends, weary of its own weight.
Don't tell me I'm running to catch the bus! I
avoids rime, the biggest rhyme of all. I
comb my hair and climb the steps to work

VLADIMIR HOLAN

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET

(Tr. from the Czech by
Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

. . . . . .

And it does last . . . Only one place shines:
the ballroom, that womb cave of hell and jealousy,
with the stabbing of the virginity of music more cruel
than the rape of a virgin . . . If the angel fought for us,
he would say just as we do: So here you are, little Mary,
dancing with others? How is that possible? Come! –
But she, because Eve is fighting on her side,
responds: I am not dancing, I mean . . . I'm afraid of words . . .
and . . . you . . . you're insane!
Perhaps! he says, and begins to draw back from her
with the cruciform horror of a painter's easel,
the horror of having to bear the image of *this* woman . . .
O yes: *this very woman*! And he leaps
and knowing that wine too is sometimes cleansed with a scourge
slaps her face along the body
now provocatively sticking out opposite the soul
and denying the promised 10 o'clock snacks of frontal things . . .
Or he will force her to swallow both engagement rings!
Or will remind her with a backing-up crab form
and then will only frighten her with a knife lacking a point
although long sharpened on a boat lacking a harbor.
Or . . . but we aren't likely to change the original shape
of a bicycle or a revolver . . .
Or a shot will ring out and he'll say to himself: I've killed
myself . . .
Or a shot will ring out and he'll say to himself: I'm a murderer!
O to *see* the human voice, to *see* it at least once,
at the moment it says *this*! The voice that until now

Earlier sections of this poem have appeared in Sulfurs #12, 13 and 15. This is the concluding section.

always lamented, or accused,
the voice which caressed, lied, and trembled, humiliated,
burdensome to itself, or sated,
the voice long awaited, or thrown into
the corner of the genitals in Priam's palace
like an acetylene torch
shining on one of Helen's hairs,
the voice which suddenly feels *not even this is knowledge*!
Meanwhile, in the ballroom, blood is wiped up with a tablecloth
whose tassels quiver and maybe make a difference
between avidity and pride, disgrace and guilt,
and jail and prison for the gentleman from Incognito . . .
However, he just stares . . . It seems he's gone dull . . . For his shame
was in his mother's loins, then he grew up
and now male-female looks at the dead woman and whispers:
'The years go by and the linen too grows old!' And as in an empty flat
from which someone was quickly moved
some bills remain—they will take him like a bill
and lead him out . . .
"Dett dichter nennt und keene
heile Hose am Arsche hatte . . ."

You lived through that? I asked Hamlet . . .
"Only once!" he replied . . . "Love is only one
and only once.
Love is truly mortal!" And he fell silent.
But because he looked like an actor not given a curtain call
I was sorry for him and pulled him
out of tragedy into the possibility of *speaking his heart* . . .

"On the contrary!" he said. "There are
no more trains for Love's Labour's Won . . .
and I do not feel like crossing the borders of recollection
in the top boots of poetry . . . But Marlowe,
Marlowe, he knew something about it . . . Everything
happens only once, only once!
But Marlowe, he knew something about it . . . and that
add a little music and we'll be moved . . .
Absurde! Ridicule! Dégoûtant!"

But, while somewhere in the distance,
lightning puked into the window of a storm,

Hamlet was persuaded and drinking
the pitch of his idea continued:
"It was at the end of Carnival. Something
for one of my crazy columns . . . I was struck
with a bishop's mitre from the pulpit
and so scientifically that I felt the differences of gender on my skull . . .
I'm for exaggeration, but of course Hyperbolos was a known demagogue:
the most beautiful girl in Verona was ravished.
I loved her unto the eternal non-ending
and now that I hear pages turning in the scandalarum book,
I feel overwhelmed by my *chastity* . . . You may laugh . . .
Scalded in cold water
I waited in uneven rhythm until the river froze over . . .
A fever-heaver hastened it . . .
Crazed, my shirt over my coat,
with patches on the fleshy and the bony,
I took off for Juliet's . . .
It happened to be market day,
but not a soul was in sight, so the doorman
was content with a bag of ginger and a card-table . . .
He let me in . . . The entrance was like a stirrup held for an archangel
mounting the horse of architecture . . .
My heart was pounding like an oil painting on tin . . .
I entered . . . How beautiful she was!
How her beauty was always at its beginning for me!
How there was no need to decide! . . .
How free my longing was!
How the riddle did not insist on being guessed!
How the eye without witnesses continued trembling
in a way that no one could see! How astonishment
went wild and was miraculously restrained!
How belchphemously the entire world appeared
as a brewery while I drank wine!
How I absolutely disregarded what to realize
or embody! . . . Without impulse,
without reason, without consequences, without fate,
she was a creature of indivisible fullness . . .
Alas, only glimpsed: beauty is a loss
unless it repeats itself for so long
that love too becomes loss.—
At that moment, through the open window, I heard

the night street-sweeper amassing
orange peels and hematite . . .
Shit above, soul below! it occurred to me.
Both are invisible . . .
Then, as an individual, having forgotten the mob of street-sweepers,
I asked her if I could play.
And I went to the piano and played
Hamletiana . . . About 20 minutes
(*tamquam in meridie staret sol*)
I played so impetuously
I seemed to be tugging out of the notes
those cruel florist wires
which stop roses from developing . . .
She rebuked me . . . We bickered . . .
We bickered at first with dry hatred
but soon as if we'd stayed in dressing-gowns
throughout a sweat-drenched day . . .
while the cycloid of a sinusoid sentence abandoned a star
and, becoming human, started to smell . . .
Then I told her why I had come . . .
It was you! she cried under herself,
as if she'd had a color in the night
and let it into her voice . . .

Why didn't I paint her back
with a right hand full of rings?
Why didn't I dance the billy club dance,
or at least the broom, with her?
Perhaps it would have been enough to have stabbed
her eiderdown and split
through a lovey-dovey door . . . When I think
that Lope de Vega bunged his musket
with the poems he composed for Elena Osorio! . . .
But suddenly behind my back I felt a cloud,
if a cloud can be a demolished house . . .

If there was still anything left in the garden,
my left hand felt it
like a shock of woman's hair;
if there was anything in the cellar,
my right hand, that super waiter,
gripped the bottle . . . Alas, it was her throat . . .
– – – – – – – – – – –
– – – – – – – – – – –

Juliet! – When murderer meets murderer, they don't kill each other,
no sir!
A girl desires and doesn't know, *because* she desires . . .
I first noticed her in the forest not far from Volterra . . .
It was before All Soul's Day and she
was breaking off the least colored twigs from the bushes.
Has she a sister or a brother? I wondered at once,
she was so beautiful that even then I was jealous . . .
Her body against my midnight lived so naturally
that, crazed with passion, I could not be jealous out of love.
Virginity! And I fallen among the fallen!
The great standing mirror of the air
returned the sleep of the heart to the Etruscan gods . . .
Not to frighten her, I coughed.
She turned, and was calm.
Her joy was still in the guardian angel
and her happiness not yet in the demon.
As if her soul was the body of the soul.
Virgin! What God invented, he wants deeply felt!

No sonnet can be sugary,
even if written by Shakespeare.
But many are poisonous,
though not composed by Gongora . . .
That's why I was silent, also because
in nature even the walls have ears
and because we use death
to live even worse.
You know the rest . . . *She was not* my lover . . .
Otherwise, my *brain* today could not finish
its meal of forgetting . . . And also, *there* was no room
let alone space . . .
Then I remembered my *mother*
(I was her 12th child), and although shod by fate
in lead boots, I rushed toward her
wearing the dead Mozart's clothing . . .

Mama! She always stood on the platform of parting
and, in the end, alone! She enters
through the smallest door when we're in trouble,
one night would not be enough to celebrate her,
even if the stars with one hand raised the car
she sat in so that, rushing
to her child, she arrived before her anguish

while the darkness went mad,
somewhere a lit window stupidly squints
with a yellow eye in the cheese of Buddhism
and ominous forebodings like the greasy cards of an omnipresent sorceress
seem to decide destiny by a Mariazell candle . . .

Mother! Her patience, her *again* and *once more*,
which could postpone eternity
if it were no longer that eternity . . .
Her quiet little steps when you were ailing
or when she brought bread and was ashamed
that God's gift once again had a badly-baked crust! In fact, she went through life
voluntarily and prodded by dread . . .
never waiting for the light within her
to straighten out its back! And she gave everything
even if you will never read her name
in a newspaper published for beggars . . .
But by then the primus stove (like the crop
of a carrier pigeon) had begun to bubble
and then spurted as when we sneeze in the silence of a funeral— —
and the convalescent man asked with contempt if mankind
really does descend into the ant heap of the world only
to beg there for its own bones . . .
But no, *mama* was here again and suddenly said:
Christmas! —even though in fact she had been saying it all year long . . .
And when that miracle came along, she was still apologizing
saying: today of all days it didn't turn out right,
the soup is bitter with bile, the fish smells like mud,
the strudel crust is hard, don't you realize, my body,
I can't cook anymore . . .
And she was there ahead of you, pouring the wine,
and then for the first time you noticed her hands,
that they'd aged, that they were wrinkled and veined,
those humble hands, hands of the *Order of Minims*,
hands so light the temptation of wings seemed to be inside them,
but hands true to everything here on earth
which like a pillow must be fluffed up
under a son's head, even if he is a murderer . . ."
— — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — —

Yes, I said, but where were *your* hands
when in the Tuileries you chatted with Robespierre
as to whether the gallows should be baptized
(and they were!)—
where were *your* hands if not there
where the brain is worn on top of one's hat,
where were *your* proud hands that prevented
a crown from being placed
on Poetry's head,
where were your proud hands that left no trace
either in a manuscript, or even
in a posthumous edition for unborn non-readers?

"Kif, shira, fasah, sibsi,
diamba, dasha, hayum, riamba, mori!" . . .
What were you mumbling? I asked.
"Just some names for hashish,"
said Hamlet and went on:
"I once told a woman: come on, let's go for a bounce,
I have a mattress stuffed with shorn nun hair
and I live on the 5th floor. . . .
Someday, she said. But when she appeared in front of my building,
she didn't know how to run up the stairs.
She was a harlot *from the steppes* . . .

I don't know, but irony doesn't die from a love for tragedy . . .
Odysseus isn't tragic, Ajax is; not David, Saul;
not Faust, Mephisto . . . And before me,
before me there was only Alcibiades, the drunken Alcibiades,
saffron colored, anguish colored . . ."

Dawn began to break. Hamlet said: "Daybreak, that whore!
But in *time* she seems too big to me . . ."
I said: That's because you're thinking about her!
He said: "Maybe!"
I said: If you like,
I'll loose the darkenings for you,
though into *space*,
and by means of your unguarded movement at that . . .
He said: "Everything, except man,
in the lightning of nature! He has found
his stage, and that does not interest me . . ."

But by then it was daybreak . . . Hamlet's right eye bulged

into his left eyelid when dawn threw
a hill onto the horizon where several stones
were attempting to recover a whole castle . . .

"Not long ago," said Hamlet, "I was with several young people
at the aging Shakespeare's in Elsinore . . .
He read us his poems . . . We smoked them,
drank them, and praised them, we were sincere,
we declared our love for him, we longed to hear more,
and when he spoke to us about books
we celebrated him as God's own librarian—
but he never found out what we were saying
when we entered the street from the casa del poeta tragico . . .

Of course, not even ignorance means happiness . . .
But a poem is a gift!"

(1949-1956, 1962)

VALLEJO: "THE SOUL THAT SUFFERED FROM BEING ITS BODY"

Recent news in different journals has confirmed that the Peruvian government is engaged in active arrangements to repatriate César Vallejo's remains which have been at rest in Paris for nearly half a century. The government wants the Peruvian poet to return home so it can celebrate his posthumous fame over his ashes. I am writing this to express my strenuous objection to the plan and my profound hope that it will never be carried out.

The persistent presence of corpses is one of the most annoying aspects of death, especially the death of the great, as Vallejo is. They are paid tribute, they are covered with national flags and flowers, they are offered municipal speeches. Countries, or rather their governments, often indulge in these veiled necrophilic practices, which help ease consciences as well as provide occasions for the most lamentable outpouring of patriotism. Although we always invoke the phrase, we rarely let the great dead rest in peace. Instead, we insist on meddling with the beyond, on recognizing life achievements only after an artist's death, appropriating by these means merits which are not our own.

It seems completely understandable that the remains of a man who dies outside his country be restored to his homeland, especially if he has expressed a desire to be buried there. However, I can see no reason why what was once Vallejo, a man who left Peru forever in 1923 and died in Paris in 1938, should be returned to the country of his birth. In fact, the Vallejo remains have already undergone a previous manipulation: after having been buried for many years in the Montrouge cemetery at the southern edge of Paris, they were moved, by his widow Georgette, to Montparnasse. To repeat this operation is grotesque.

History should not be modified. History tells us that Vallejo died in Paris because he *lived* in Paris, where he wrote half of his work. We know nothing concerning Vallejo's own wishes as to where he preferred to be buried; why should we attribute such wishes to him? To move his remains is an action which brings dubious honor to those involved.

If Vallejo's remains are returned, we should have to carry through to the absurd but logical end and ask that all the remains of poets, writers, artists and famous men born in Peru but having died abroad be returned

to their country. Perhaps there are even some bureaucrats who believe that this is the ideal solution. I can just see an immense funeral boat, picking up coffins, bones and dust, arriving in Peru amidst a huge demonstration of *post mortem* nationalism. Who, really, would want to witness such a spectacle?

Living or dying abroad does not make one less Peruvian, or Chilean etc. Least of all Vallejo, who so deeply felt and expressed the experience of being Peruvian in spite of being far away, of having suffered numerous offenses from his people and the authorities, of having been ignored when he most needed help and friendship. Rather than wasting money on vain expenditures which Peru can ill afford now, it would be better for the government to do, at last, a sensible thing for Vallejo, such as publishing a decently-edited edition of his works for all the secondary school and university students who are presently forced to choose between expensive editions or vulgar pirated ones. Also, it might find a better home for Vallejo's manuscripts and papers that, on a whim of Georgette, were given to the Hogar Clínica San Juan de Dios, a charitable institution on the outskirts of Lima, certainly a worthy social organization, but one obviously lacking the proper technical means to conserve so valuable a legacy. The government should give Vallejo's work, not his poor bones, the national attention which, up to now, has been mostly nominal and ineffective. Why not create, for instance, a research center for Vallejo studies?

Near the end of his life, in the fall of 1937, Vallejo wrote in the poem whose title is the title of this note: "You suffer, you endure and again you suffer horribly, / miserable ape, / Darwin's little man." I see no reason why the spirit of this man who was capable of addressing in a profound and noble way his repeated suffering in life should, for reasons which lie outside the meaning of his lifework, be subjected to a further disturbance of his dust.

JOSE MIGUEL OVIEDO

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF PAUL BLACKBURN
Edited by Edith Jarolim
Persea Books 1985 687 pp. $37.50

The Collected Poems of Paul Blackburn—close to 700 pages of text—weighs as much as a bag of groceries and has "definitive" written all over it. When the book was published last year there was almost nothing of Blackburn's to be found; now we have everything. Which is physically—visually—almost too much. I'm not suggesting that any lover of the

language ought to be less than grateful to the labors of Edith Jarolim, but it is somewhat disconcerting to see a poet of thin collections and fugitive appearances suddenly immured in the wrappings of respectability. What's more, I suspect that this compendium will not exert an immediate magnetic appeal upon readers hitherto unfamiliar with the poet. For Jarolim's decision to dismantle the unities of the original book appearances, and to proceed, instead, strictly in the order of ascertainable date of composiiton, presents the fidgety newcomer with a massive and unbroken edifice of poems. While the reader is, it's true, given a closer insight into the sequential evolution of a style, he is also deprived of any sense of how the poet wished to present himself during a particular phase. And Blackburn, we soon discover, was supremely alert to the movement of signal waves from one poem to another: over and above the individual poems there was always the "poem" that they comprised through their arrangement. While Jarolim has included a letter code in her index to tell us what book a given poem originally appeared in, we have no precise indication of positioning.

I wanted to get this cavil out of the way straight off, for there is much to celebrate in the carefully garnered abundance. And, to give Jarolim's editorial decision its due, the chronology is instructive. For Blackburn was striving above all else to capture the moment: each poem marks the one-time intersection of a particular inner state with a particular setting and circumstance. The temporal ordering of these "moments" turns the volume into an odd sort of autobiography. I say "odd" because Blackburn never supplies any antecedent material for his notations, and he does not confess himself except through arrangement of detail and rhythmic shifts. The conventional contents of autobiography are the very thing that this poetry has excised. And yet, for all that – because of it! – we feel the sharp pulsations of a life that was fought for and enjoyed from one day to the next.

Blackburn's poetic "career" – if we can apply such a tainted word to an enterprise so open-ended and exploratory – spanned just over two decades, from the late 1940's when he was at the University of Wisconsin (but most likely getting his real education through his correspondence with Pound and Creeley), until 1971 when throat cancer finally claimed him. His production was ample by any poet's standards, and even a collection trimmed of garrulous excess – for Blackburn did indulge in a good bit of ephemeral word-sport – would have a commanding heft. The temptation for the critic, naturally, is to seek out the trajectory, the arc of development. And one kind of arc is clearly discernible in these pages: from first to last the poetry shows a progressive annexation of experience and locale – better: experience *in* locale – and a compositional control that becomes more instinctive, more uniquely a signature, by the year.

In early Blackburn, for example, we still feel the trace-markings of his apprenticeship: Pound and Provençal (between 1954 and 1957,

Blackburn lived in France and Spain, doing many of the translations that were later gathered in *PROENSA: An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry*), the powerful dogma of Olson's projective verse theories, and the cat's paw choreography of Williams. Later, however, through the decade of the 60's, an idiosyncratic personal force increasingly sweeps away any sense of learned procedure. A defiant loosening of form and idiom convinces the reader that the words were rushed to the page along an avenue of timed traffic lights. The poems are sharp, aggressive, edgy with urban adrenalin. A turbulent emotionality is felt to abut almost every line, but it is never itself brought forward as a subject. Finally, as the 70's encroach, the shadow of the wing of mortality passes over the poems—even as, paradoxically, the poems themselves achieve a wry, stoical calm. Reading the pieces from the last year of Blackburn's life, we are hard pressed to realize that this quick-eyed, whimsical man is dying of cancer.

It would be too simple, nevertheless, to think of Blackburn's progress as an ever-more-direct confrontation with the real. For this would imply that the poet was getting more and more of his inner being onto the page—and this is manifestly untrue. Throughout his poetry, Blackburn silences the inner man in order to favor the present-tense creature of the senses. He rarely declares overt emotion and searches no psychological depths. Everything he wants to tell us is there in the patterned observation of the moment. As Gilbert Sorrentino once noted in an essay on Blackburn:

> The exquisite ordering of the common materials of the poet's life is the architecture by means of which he not only deployed them in balanced design within the poem, but by means of which he changed them into instances of artifact. His poems are as artificial as those of his beloved troubadours.[1]

This is the central tension and the source of much of Blackburn's force: that in his pursuit of the immediate present he never relinquished his aesthetic purchase, never stopped controlling the strokes with which he registered the chaotic profusion of the world. As jumbled and casual as his surfaces at times appear, they nearly always obey the dictates of a strict and subtle music.

Neither, in tracing Blackburn's development, can we neglect the profound influence of the times and the milieu. Where some poets evolve hermetically, following only the urges and imperatives of the voice, Blackburn did everything he could to enlarge his susceptibility to the here and now. He limned as honestly and accurately as possible the force-lines of the moment, recognizing implicitly their extension into the past and future. To speak, therefore, of a formal relaxation, or of an intrusion of

1. "Singing, Virtuoso" in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, Spring-Summer, 1976, pp. 57-67.

disruptive energies into his work in the 60's, as if these were merely private poetic tendencies, would be delusive. Blackburn was opening his pores to the strange electricity moving through the culture, especially the frontier that was the Lower East Side. If ever the spirit of a time and a place found its way into poetry, it was in the magnesium flashes of some of these lines.

*

"Suerte," written in 1956 during Blackburn's first European sojourn, is a concise example of the restrained lyricism of his early poetry. Here we find the Imagist echo, as well as the thoughtful balancing of rhythmic requirements with breath intervals:

You shall not always sit in sunlight watching
weeds grow out of the drainpipes
or burros and shadows of burros
come up the street bringing sand
the first one of the line with a
bell
always.
With a bell.
Grace is set
a term of less than a year.
Another bell sounds the hours of your sun
limits
sounding below human voices,
counts the hours of weeds, rain, darkness, all
with a bell.

The first one with a bell always.

Simple, relaxed, and precise. The careful line-breaks and spacing, as well as the shy distancing of self (in spite of the fact that the poem is self-addressed), recall Williams. This most unassuming of lyrics succeeds through a subtle aural engineering: first it breaks five lines of sedate, if breathy, observation with a lurch and a wobble (bell/always./With a bell.); thereupon Blackburn instigates a lovely alternation between the long *a* sounds and the sibilants and punctuates this with the repetition of the word "bell." The final "bell always" links the separate effects and closes the poem with a delicate suggestion of expiring echoes. When poets and critics speak of Blackburn's "ear" – and they always do – it is this keen feel for the way that sounds separate and coalesce, and this confident handling of rhythmic gradations that they have in mind.

Blackburn's poems of the 60's have a variety and vegetal profusion

that make it impossible to cite a representative passage. The poet moves from the most free-spirited and fanciful sort of wordplay:

stink, stank, stunk,
stinker.
the septic tank over
flows, *estanque*, to
save it, tanker, to hold it,
stack?

—from "The Word" (1965)

to an anecdotal urban reportage:

"C'mon, get out,
y'gotta get out," sez Milly,
"stop sleeping'n get out, I call the cop."
The old man
crumples up his check and drops it onto the sawdust floor.

—from "Sunflower Rock" (1966)

to the most pruned lines of requia:

Two years ago
Jim died
doing battle with a truck
on Third Avenue
from a motorbike seat
shaking and
cold sober

*

Love is not enuf
Friendship is not enuf
Not even art
is/Life is too much

—from "16 Sloppy Haiku" (1966)

What strikes us most as we read this middle section of the book is Blackburn's porosity, his willingness to sound out all registers of his experience. The lyric tenderness so evident in the early work has not disappeared; but pain and confusion have now been accepted as a necessary part of its setting. This maturing shift becomes increasingly apparent as we read in sequence. Indeed, I would argue that Blackburn is best read in batches of a dozen or more poems at a sitting. Only then can we begin to appreciate the contrapuntal variety, the way that a quip can become a defiant affirmation by virtue of its positioning, or how the somber con-

text of one poem can throw its shadow over the bright effusion of another. This reasoning, pursued far enough, would end by having us consider Blackburn's whole output as a single long poem. Possibly this is what Jarolim had in mind when she decided to unravel the separate collections. Without a doubt, the poems acquire an enlarged referentiality when read in sequence. This is *not* to consider them as entries in an on-going diary (though they are often highly diaristic) – the rhythmic variety, the precision of the modulations, and the attention to balance and closure preclude any such facile comparisons. But each separate shape can be said to secure its larger completion with reference to the other shapes, all of which are organically bound to the ongoing motion of a life.

An example might clarify this. Among the poems written in 1966, we find a series – which includes "16 Sloppy Haiku" – that takes as its subject the death of Blackburn's friend Bob Reardon. It is a bitter interlude. And at the end of his poem "The List," where he speaks through the persona of Reardon, Blackburn comes as close as he ever will to hitting the elegaic note:

> "No rites
> but some friends reading words I loved, mostly
> other men's words, only a few of my own, other
> friends hearing them. Regret
> only what was not finished, regret only the loss
> of afternoon sun thru the window at McSorley's, that
> table's wood whitened as my bones are in the fire, the
> cold rain of this later date, all that.
> Say goodbye for me."

Without the sound of these lines in our minds, a later poem, "The Island" – set, presumably, in McSorley's – would be little more than a well-turned mood-sketch. But once we have the larger picture, the closing lines carry a beautiful hint of redemption. I would even say that they touch lyric profundity:

> Six men stand at the bar
> Seven men sit at the tables
> now eight
> now nine
> a sixteenth man in the urinals
> Matty behind the bar
> George in the back .
> Silence there is & 2 conversations
> sometimes 3 .
> It's March 9th, 3:30 in the afternoon
>
> The loudest sound in this public room
> is the exhaust fan in the east window

or the cat at my back
asleep there in the sun
bleached tabletop, golden
shimmer of ale .

The poem, in a very important way, requires the earlier passage. Without it we partake of the languor of a quiet March afternoon, nothing more. With it in mind, however, we feel an immemorial recognition: this is just how the living resume the momentum of habits after a death. The numeration is ominous. But then comes the "golden/ shimmer of ale": it is like a light winking at us from beyond.

*

In September of 1967, Blackburn was awarded a much-awaited Guggenheim fellowship; he embarked promptly for Europe. The period that followed is often spoken of as one of inner renaissance for the poet. He met Joan, his third wife-to-be, and his work took on a directed and energized immediacy. In April of 1968 he wrote the first of the many journal poems that he would write in the few years remaining to him.

The designation "journal" is somewhat misleading, for these more personalized pieces are every bit as much *poems* as anything Blackburn was to write. The word indicates more of a shift in focus than in technique or mode of presentation. We find the same linear acrobatics, the same discursive word-play, and no slackening in attention to spacing or line-breaks. But from this point on there is a greater unity about Blackburn's production. It is as if the poet had finally decided that his own immediate experience—with his own persona as the acknowledged center—was material enough for all the poetry that he wished to write. With the transition comes a perceptible rise in temperature. The poems are more genial; they also tend to be looser, freer in their rambling. Conceiving of poems as journals seems to have allowed Blackburn to take a freer hand, to work in more personal reference. This latter trait becomes a liability as soon as we pry individual poems loose from their surroundings; much of the depiction then looks one-dimensional. But the fact is, as I indicated earlier, we have to take Blackburn on his own terms, to read him serially and to keep track of his autobiographical sign-posts. Thus, we cannot but follow along with the course of Joan's pregnancy, the visit with the Cortazars at Saignon, the birth of their son Carlos, the stages of the family's trip through the American West, and so on. Blackburn forces us to hew to the informal and often chaotic progress of his life.

A few excerpts from "Journal: July 21/22, 1969" will give some indication of Blackburn's way of modulating between the poetic and notational poles:

Those boys comin' back fr/the moon
Armstrong, Aldrin & company, & I
make my own countdown : score
be
tween
dusk & midnight, I
missed one rabbit & got one, I think,
rear wheels, one small bird, &
also about dusk
(the small ones do a dance in front of the
windshield in pairs)

a young hawk crossed
right to left &
cut back

hit the upper right side
the VW truck's window
W H A P
& bounced off.

and:

Springfield (Mo.) to near to Boise City (Keyes)
OKLA

HOMA

500 miles in a day
then Raton, Cimarron, Eagle Nest
Joan drove those mountains , Raton to
Taos on 65 . 111 north to Tres Piedres &
285 straight up
into those hills (2 rainstorms, in the
distance lightning) & at La Jara, 14
miles south of our mark, our Car-
los starts
HOWLING . we . stop . feed,
walk him around a bit

These passages reveal a great deal both about the range and limitations of Blackburn's journal approach. The first discovers a narrative momentum and sustains a nervous and complex energy as it oscillates between the ironic (and defensive) reckoning and careful descriptive miming. The hesitation between "I think," in line 7 and "rear wheels" in the following line, for example, catches the pace of the perception exactly; likewise, the staggering of line clusters, the movement from right to left

and back as it plays off the depicted motion of the hawk resolves perfectly in the flat "W H A P." The second passage, on the other hand, seems to me full of gratuitous elements. The information is only of private interest, and the staging of the lines and breaks serves no purpose that I can detect. There is, of course, the punning line-break of "Car-/ los," but the bulk of the verbiage is the kind best consigned to the private travel log.

Blackburn's effort, as his career matured, was to bring more and more of the language of prosaic daily experience into the poetic matrix. To some extent his was a tactic of framing: the choreographed lines would signal to the reader that the words were to be assessed for their aural, visual and semantic functions. Heightened attention would reveal the underlying poetic bedding of all utterance. The ultimate goal—and Blackburn must have thought about this—would be to keep the transformative lens in place at all times, to come to see all language as poetry. Conceptual artists from Duchamp on have had similar ambitions for the visual sphere. If they have not finally succeeded, it may be because they have not paid sufficient heed to the law of diminishing returns, and to the fact that the "poetic" or "aesthetic" achieves its status in relation to the ordinary, the uninteresting. This, at times, is Blackburn's failing as well. When, for instance, he attempts to turn a recipe or a set of highway directions into poetry. Exercises like this do not so much poeticize the subject as weaken the transformative potential of the framing device.

Fortunately, most of the journal poems—which come to dominate his *oeuvre* in the last two years of his life—work. They are alert and witty, uncluttered transcriptions of events, moods and observations. And once we learn of Blackburn's illness, their lightness generates a reverse effect.

The first direct mention of Blackburn's cancer (there are very few in these pages) comes in the entry titled "17.IV.71," written some months after the diagnosis:

> Cities & towns I have to give up this year
> on account of my cancer: Amster-
> dam, Paris, Apt, Saignon and Aix,
> (Toulouse I'll never loose), Peripignan and Dax,

All at once we understand that his casual, playful, deprecatory humor has all along been a form of stoicism, that the humor and lightness have looked suffering and death in the eye and are thereby all the more humorous and light. For a poet with cancer to make verbal play with the homophonic "Amster" is evidence of an absolute vocational purity. Of itself, it may not stand as profound; but once we have engaged the life behind the poems, the unwavering dedication to the clarity and joy of language, it transmits a considerable moral and spiritual largesse. The remaining journals are affecting in much the same way. Though Blackburn

does not deviate from his earlier manner – not once does he take his sufferings as a subject – his every observation is now back-lit by our awareness. The daily life of the body and its senses becomes profound, as the poet always meant it to be, as it always has been.

SVEN BIRKERTS

THE NEW NIEDECKERS

FROM THIS CONDENSERY: THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF LORINE NIEDECKER
edited by Robert Bertholf. Jargon Society, 1985. $30.

THE GRANITE PAIL: THE SELECTED POEMS OF LORINE NIEDECKER
edited by Cid Corman. North Point Press, 1985. $11.

The simultaneous appearance of two new editions of Lorine Niedecker's writing is cause for wonder. *Sulfur* readers need hardly be told that she is one of the century's finest poets, but for those who didn't happen to buy her books in the late 60's – the Fulcrum collections were later pulped – her reputation since her death in 1970 has been built on xerox and hearsay. Now the work is back in print: for the general reader, the North Point *Selected* edited by Cid Corman; for fans and scholars, the Jargon *Complete* edited by Robert Bertholf. What follows is simply a consumer report: not an assessment of Niedecker's poetry, but a first glance at its latest presentation.

The Jargon book had been promised for so many years that it took on almost legendary status. Now it's here, edited by one of the leading scholars of contemporary poetry, and it is, I'm surprised and sorry to say, a disaster. Given the current level of textual scholarship, it is a scandal. One hardly knows where to begin to describe all that's wrong with the book.

For starters, this is the least user-friendly *Collected* in memory. One has to madly flip pages to find anything. There is no index of titles and first lines – vexatious when comparing the text with earlier editions, trying to find familiar poems that Bertholf has now relocated (and sometimes retitled), or tracking down the frequent repetitions of poems. The table of contents is not always accurate. The book has 23 pages of notes in small print, but the notes are neither numbered nor keyed to pages in the main text. The notes generally appear in the order the poems appear, but not always – for example, the note to "Lake Superior" (p. 161) follows the note to "J.F. Kennedy" (p. 177). There are no page numbers for other poems

mentioned in a note, and in the absence of an index comparison becomes a chore. Many of the poems have no notes and remain a mystery as to where they come from or why they are placed where they are. And the book is full of typos.

Bertholf was faced with a difficult task: Niedecker spent her life rewriting all of her poems and arranging and rearranging them into groups and sequences. She was, he writes, "meticulous about titles and groupings of her poems." "Preoccupied with the processes of perception and the natural generation of form," she "was continually involved in creating sequential formalities and contexts."

Although "she was more concerned with her order than an exact chronological order," Bertholf has decided to present the poems chronologically, sometimes interrupting sequences or restoring (in the main text) poems Niedecker clearly wanted omitted. Many of the dates for the poems are guesses and only some of the guesses are explained in the notes. And although "the last typed copy of a poem does not represent its final state, only a version conceived of at that given moment, " "the last appearance of a text is assumed to be the preferred." Nevertheless, the Fulcrum collected, *My Life By Water,* has (supposedly) been "accepted as the basic text and configuration of poems for this edition," despite the fact that poems were rewritten and rearranged after that edition was published. It would be impossible to follow these ground rules with consistency, and Bertholf doesn't.

Niedecker oversaw the publication of five books in her lifetime: two chapbooks, *New Goose* (1946) and *My Friend Tree* (1961); a Fulcrum book of new poems, *North Central* (1968); the Jargon *T & G: The Collected Poems (1936-1966)* (1969); and the Fulcrum *My Life By Water: Collected Poems 1936-1968* (1970). A volume of unpublished poems, *Blue Chicory,* edited by Cid Corman, was published posthumously by Elizabeth Press in 1976. (This is referred to as "BC" throughout Bertholf's notes, but dropped from his key to abbreviations.) At her death, according to Bertholf, she left three manuscripts: "Earth and Its Atmosphere" (also referred to in the book as "Earth and Its Armosphere," which, given Niedecker's preoccupation with the Bomb, is not impossible), "Harpsichord & Salt Fish" and "The Very Veery." Bertholf lists the poems included in "Harpsichord"; "Earth" is frequently cited, but no table of contents is offered; and "Veery" is only mentioned in passing twice. As these manuscripts are apparently the sources for many of Bertholf's "preferred" texts, it is odd that in two of the three cases no information about them is given.

Preparing her first collected poems, *T & G,* Niedecker divided her life's work into six sections:

1. New Goose and My Friend Tree
2. For Paul
3. Ballads

4. The Years Go By
5. In Exchange for Haiku
6. Home/World

For the Fulcrum collected, *My Life By Water*, a few years later, she retained these same sections and added two more to include the poems from *North Central*: "My Life By Water" (which consists of the title poem and "Paean to Place") and "North Central" (which includes two sequences, "Lake Superior" and "Traces of Living Things" and the long poem "Wintergreen Ridge").

Section 1 presumably contains the poems she wished to retain from the earlier chapbooks. (It's nearly impossible to find those books, and I've been unable to consult them. Bertholf does not list their contents.) Both the *T & G* and *Life* versions have the same poems in this section—*Life* has one less poem than *T & G*—and, with a few exceptions, the poems are in the same order.

Section 2 includes the same poems in both versions; with one exception they are in the same order. Section 3 includes the same poems in both versions, but in completely different order; *Life* has one less poem than *T & G*. Section 4 includes the same poems in both versions in roughly the same order; *Life* has four more poems than *T & G*, including one from *T & G*'s Section 6. Section 5 has the same poems in both versions in a different order. Section 6 has the same poems in different order, with *Life* omitting two from *T & G* and adding four.

I spell this out to emphasize that Niedecker, twice given the opportunity to present her life's work, both times included virtually the same poems under the same headings and often in the same order. As Bertholf says, *My Life By Water* (or the combination of *Life* and *T & G*) should be taken as the basic text, with unpublished, suppressed or variant poems supplementing the primary configuration.

This has simply not been done. Bertholf divides his book into seven sections:

1. Early Poems
2. For Paul and Other Poems
3. The Years Go By
4. In Exchange for Haiku
5. Home/World
6. North Central
7. Harpsichord & Salt Fish

Bertholf's Section 1 contains the poems from Niedecker's Section 1 and many others—including something from her high school yearbook—which she presumably chose to suppress. There is no indication as to which poems were selected for *Tree* and *Goose* or the *T & G/Life* selection. The poems have supposedly been rearranged in chronological order, but many

of them are not annotated and it is impossible to tell. Among the poems that are annotated, to take one example, "I wrote another" (p. 26) is cited as coming from a letter to Louis Zukofsky dated 1959 and written in response to his *I's (pronounced eyes)* which was published at the time; this is followed by "Grampa's got his old age pension," which first appeared in *New Goose* (1946); which in turn is followed by "A working man appeared in the street' which was published in *Furioso* in 1939. There are many other examples of this chronological jumble in this section and throughout the book. As neither the calendar nor Niedecker's sequential arrangement is being honored, one wonders what's going on. Surely Bertholf should have had a section of uncollected early poems followed by one or two sections for *New Goose* and *My Friend Tree* indicating the original books' contents, Niedecker's later selection, and adding on, in a clearly marked fashion, the unpublished or suppressed contemporary poems he has uncovered.

I can't begin to untangle Bertholf's section 2. It consists of "Dear Paul: Four Versions" followed by "For Paul: Six Alternative Sequences," the latter numbered one to eight (!) plus one group titled, with no explanation, "Alternative Ending." The poems of "Group Eight" are numbered in the table of contents I., II., III., IV., IV. (sic) and they are followed by "Alternative" numbered [IV.], [V.], [VI.], [VII.], [VIII.]. These overlapping Roman numerals have no evident correspondences. Apparently these are all manuscript versions of "Dear Paul" and "For Paul" prepared at one time or another; the poems keep repeating themselves. Strangely enough, none of these six (or seven or eight) versions of "For Paul" is the one Niedecker included (in virtually identical format) in both *T & G* and *Life*—nor is it even mentioned in the notes. How much simpler it would have been to preserve Niedecker's own preferred version, and consign these repetitive variations to the notes.

Bertholf's Section 3 conflates the poems from Niedecker's "Ballads" and "The Years Go By," switches the poems around and adds many others, some of which have already appeared in Bertholf's "For Paul" and one of which appears in Niedecker's "For Paul." Nowhere are Niedecker's original groupings mentioned. To give another example of the experience of reading this book: Glancing through this section I was struck by an interesting and weighty title, "The Element Mother," which, as far as I know, was never used in any of the previous published texts. "The Element Mother" here is the title for a sequence of three poems: "She's dead" (usually known as "Mother's dead") and "The Graves," which appeared in *Life* as separate poems, and the previously unpublished "Kepler." Obviously Bertholf has based this title and grouping on something, but exactly what is anybody's guess. Neither title nor grouping is in the earlier books, and Bertholf states that the general title in the (final and supposedly preferred) "Earth" manuscript is "The Graves," where, furthermore, Niedecker omitted (from

what?) the third poem. For the title we are forced to take Bertholf's word – as we are throughout the book – he offers no explanations. And the text we are given is evidently against Niedecker's wishes. (Why isn't the third poem restored in the notes and not in the main text?)

Niedecker's two published versions in book form of "In Exchange for Haiku" contained the same poems in different order. Bertholf's "Exchange" adds ten poems, some of them repeated elsewhere in the book, and once again never notes which of the poems Niedecker included or suppressed. The same occurs in his "Home/World": many poems are added, with no indication of the original grouping.

Niedecker's "North Central" was virtually identical in the *Life* and *North Central* versions (one poem was omitted for *Life*). Bertholf's "North Central" adds 19 poems to the original group, including some that have appeared earlier in the book. Most shocking is that "Traces of Living Things," one of Niedecker's finest sequences, has been turned into an amorphous blob. In the *Life* version it contained 19 poems (20 in *North Central*); in Bertholf it seems to contain 38 poems. Seems, that is, because the edition has no consistent format for headings and subheadings, and there is no way to tell – either in the text or the table of contents – where the sequence ends. (The 19 new poems are jumbled in with the 19 originals.) Bertholf's notes provide no clue: the *North Central* and *Life* versions are not mentioned, but a version containing 10 poems which appeared in *Origin* magazine is.

Bertholf's final section is called "Harpsichord & Salt Fish," and it contains the poems from the "Harpsichord" manuscript (including the wonderful Jefferson, Darwin and William Morris poems) and a grab-bag of other poems. As "Harpsichord" was clearly intended as a separate grouping, it should have had its own section. The rest of the poems are placed in no discernible order – seven poems noted on pp. 334-35 jump back and forth over seven years – and many of them are unexplained. The well-known "Paean to Place," for some reason, is among the last poems, although it appeared in *Life*. The poetry section of the book – it is followed by the radio plays and miscellaneous prose – ends with "From Thomas Jefferson," the first four lines of the Jefferson poem from the same section, and "From Darwin," the first four lines (six words) of the Darwin poem which appears a few pages back. There are no explanations for these fragments and, as the last poems, they give the impression that we have ended up in Niedecker's wastebasket. That she apparently considered publishing these lines as separate poems could have been simply noted.

One could – and someone will – fill pages with further examples. To sum it up, the book neither follows chronological order, nor takes *My Life By Water* as the basic text, nor allows the final manuscript versions to supplant earlier versions – the editor's stated (and impossible) goals. Most of Niedecker's minor (magazine or manuscript) variations are

repetitiously laid out in the main text, but her major (book) variations are neither presented nor even noted. Suppressed poems are restored to sequences in the main text—not in the notes where they belong—and without noting that they were suppressed. Information on the unpublished or uncollected poems is, at best, spotty. New titles, groupings or variations for many of the poems are presented without explanation. It is sometimes impossible to tell where a sequence ends, and always a chore to find a specific poem or a note. Worst of all, anyone reading Niedecker for the first time in this edition may well assume that Niedecker was not the perfectionist of reputation but a fusspot who endlessly dithered over a small group of poems. This is more than unfair to Niedecker; it is almost hostile. Bertholf, like any other editor of a "definitive" edition, should have established a basic text (using, of course, *My Life By Water*) and confined the ditherings, suppressions and variations to appendices and (professional!) notes. It won't happen for decades, but the *Complete Niedecker* is a book that will have to be done all over again.

Fortunately for those who want to discover Niedecker, there is the North Point/Cid Corman *Selected*—the first widely distributed edition of her work. It is beautifully produced, generally well-edited, and—after the Bertholf—utterly unconfusing. A book for readers to read.

Corman divides the book into three sections, "My Friend Tree," "North Central," and "Harpsichord & Salt Fish," corresponding to the early, middle, and late periods of Niedecker's writing. The selection, despite Bertholf's new arrangements, exclusively follows *My Life By Water* and *North Central*; the poems even appear in the same order. A sequence like "Traces of Living Things" is presented in the *North Central* version, not Bertholf's, and it is clearly delineated.

Corman's first section includes 32 of the 94 poems from *Life*'s "New Goose," "For Paul," "Ballads," "The Years Go By" and "Haiku" sections; his second section has 24 of the 44 poems from *Life*'s "My Life By Water," "Home/World," and "North Central" sections. The third section consists of six poems from the "Harpsichord" manuscript and six posthumously published poems which Corman included in *Blue Chicory* and which Bertholf has scattered in various places of his book.

What we have, then, is less than half of Niedecker's poetry. At least all of the important later long poems and sequences are here. What is missing is any indication that the earlier poems were originally parts of sequences or groups. This is partially justified by the fact that Niedecker often published the poems separately. But it was unnecessary: the poems are printed one to a long page, and the first half of the book is mainly (Cormanesque) white space. Lovely to look at—but not worth the sacrifice of further poems, general structures and a wider range.

More damaging is that Corman has tended to emphasize the lyrical

and autobiographical—the Corman side—at the expense of Niedecker's political poems. Many of her poems were written in response to the news of the day—including the deaths of Stevenson, Kennedy and Churchill—and many of them deal with the local ramifications of the national news, from the Depression to the atomic bomb. Nearly all of these are missing. The result is a picture of Niedecker as a poet of nature and domesticity who, late in her life, took an interest in history—"probing other voices into a larger plenum," in Corman's words. (He neatly omits the early historical poems.)

It is a reinforcement of the image of Niedecker as an isolated female "condenser," the Dickinson of Fort Atkinson. Susan Howe, for one, has demolished this version of the Belle of Amherst, and it's time the same was done for the Wisconsin plover. This will, I suspect, only occur when the boys—Corman, Bertholf and Jonathan Williams, the heirs of Zukofsky, Bunting and Ian Hamilton Finlay—relinquish their roles as keepers of the flame. With the exception of Bertholf (who's half on the track), none of them has ever described a Niedecker who was well-read, well-informed, and politically and socially alert. It is potentially good news that a woman, Lisa Pater Faranda, has been entrusted with editing her letters.

In the meantime, the world is still waiting for a *Complete Niedecker*, one that can be read without going (or getting) mad, and a fuller *Selected*, one that would consider the poems that Corman has passed over, such as:

Who was Mary Shelley?
What was her name
before she married?

She eloped with this Shelley
she rode a donkey
till the donkey had to be carried.

Mary was Frankenstein's creator
his yellow eye
before her husband was to drown

Created the monster nights
after Byron, Shelley
talked the candle down.

Who was Mary Shelley?
She read Greek, Italian
She bore a child

Who died
and yet another child
who died.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

OF CANONS AND CONTEMPORARIES

Ezra Pound was born on 30 October 1885, and this autumn his centenary was celebrated from Hailey, Idaho (the place of his birth) to New Haven, Alabama, Paris, and Tokyo. At Orono, Maine, poets as unlike one another as Donald Davie and Allen Ginsberg spoke of Pound's influence; at San Jose, such younger poets as Michael Palmer and Michael Davidson lectured on Pound's use of language, his stylistic habits, his relationship to earlier writers. However serious the controversy about Pound's politics, his anti-Semitism, indeed his ethics is today, there can be no doubt that in 1985 Pound is considered one of our great poets—for many people, THE great poet of the twentieth-century and certainly a poet's poet. At the two conferences I myself attended (Orono and San Jose), I was struck by the excitement, erudition, and range of Pound scholarship. No other twentieth century poet has stimulated such searching and subtle criticism, a criticism, incidentally, that comes not only from around the world but from Left as well as Right, from deconstructionists as well as traditional scholars, from Zen Buddhists and Confucians as well as committed Christians and confirmed atheists. In the graduate seminar today the debate about the place of the *Cantos*, not only in literary history, but also as an emblem of Modernist culture and society seems to be at its height.

Or is it? At the very moment that the Yale and Alabama Pound symposia were being held, the Harvard University Press published *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, edited by Helen Vendler. This anthology, which begins with the poetry of Wallace Stevens, "since he flowered late and came into his own only after the 1955 publication of the *Collected Poems*" (p. 16), systematically and quietly removes Pound and his circle from the canon. ["Stevens,"] writes Vendler, "is our chief link between the earlier high modernists (Eliot, Pound, Williams, Crane, Moore) and the later poets," an odd statement indeed in view of the fact that the full text of Pound's *Cantos* did not appear until 1970 and therefore is not likely to have exerted an influence *before* that date. Or again, how could Stevens be the "chief link" between Williams and "the later poets," given the fact that *Paterson* was not completed until 1958, three years after Stevens' death, and *Pictures from Breughel* was not published until 1962? Or, to take a third example, how could Stevens' poetry mediate between a Modernist work like H.D.'s *Trilogy* and contemporary poets, given the fact the first edition of the *Trilogy*, written during World War II, was in 1973?

But of course it all depends on what "later poets" one has in mind. Stevens may well point the way to many of the other thirty-four poets included in *The Harvard Book* for the simple reason that this anthology omits all of the following: Charles Olson, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Edward Dorn, Denise Levertov, Louis Zukof-

sky, George Oppen, Paul Blackburn, Jerome Rothenberg, to mention only the most prominent American poets in the Pound-Williams tradition. Although Vendler is careful to point out that "this anthology can be nothing more than a sampling of what seems to my taste satisfying" (p. 16), her own authority and the Harvard imprimatur clearly make this particular anthology take on a canonical aura. And so we must ask the question: what are the contours of a poetry landscape that, on the one hand, celebrates Pound in the fashion I described above and, on the other, authorizes or at least sets the stage for the publication of *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*?

The first thing to say, I suppose, is that the current situation is very different from that of 1960, the year that Grove Press published Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*. At that time, there was an identifiable Establishment, whose emblematic anthology, used in classrooms across America, was the two-volume *New American Poets of England and America* (1957), edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson. Distinguishing his own canon of poets from theirs, Donald Allen could say, quite simply, that what he was calling the "new" poetry had "one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse" (p. xi). Today, such a distinction would be meaningless because Olson and Creeley have become just as "academic" as were Lowell or Berryman, if by "academic" we mean those poets who teach, and whose work is taught, in the universities. Nor do the old distinctions between "conservative" and "radical" publishers (Harvard University Press, say, versus New Directions) make much sense today. Harvard has just published the selected writings of one of the most radical poets of the twentieth century, the Russian Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov, and it is also the press that brought out Robert von Hallberg's important *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (1978). Again, the University of California Press is responsible for bringing both Olson's *Maximus* and Zukofsy's *"A"* back into print, and for publishing the *Collected Poems* of Robert Creeley, now to be followed by a volume of Collected Prose. Even Bruce Andrews' and Charles Bernstein's *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, for that matter, was published, not by some struggling small press or even by New Directions but by the Southern Illinois University Press.

We can no longer, then, talk about the "raw" and the "cooked," or about "closed forms" and "naked poetry," as Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey called it in their excellent anthology of "Recent American Poetry in Open Forms" (1969). This might suggest that the eighties are characterized by a healthy eclecticism, a cheerful pluralism that insures that everyone gets invited to the party. But the fact is that an anthology like the *Harvard Book* is much less eclectic than, say, Richard Ellmann's 1976 *New Oxford Book of American Verse*, which included such poets as Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and Dorn along with the bulk of the poets who appear

in the Vendler anthology. Indeed, our total lack of consensus about "the state of the art" testifies less to a generous pluralism than to a curious indifference to the dissemination of poetry on the part of the very persons who should be concerned with it—poetry critics, reviewers, editors, and publishers, as well as those theorists who deal with questions of poetics, and of Modernism and Postmodernism.

What we might call the new indifference goes hand in hand with a preoccupation with theory as the literary discourse that really matters. For the very same critics who cannot find a way of discussing whether Pound's *Cantos* is the great poem of the century or merely, in Vendler's words, a "great failed effort" (p. 11), the very same critics who talk repeatedly about "opening up the canon" or "breaking down the old canon," are slavish in their deference to the canonical critics of our day. What self-respecting anthology of contemporary theory, for example, would dare to omit the names of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida or Kristeva, and, closer to home, of Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, or Hayden White? If Harvard were to publish something called *The Harvard Book of Contemporary Criticism* and included, say, only deconstructionists or reader-response critics or Marxist/feminists theorists, there would be an immediate outcry. Or, more probably, the outcry would have been circumvented by the publisher, who would have shown the Table of Contents to a variety of "respectable" critics and would have been cautioned to make the anthology more inclusive. But in the case of the *Harvard Book of Contemporary Poetry*, Helen Vendler was evidently given *carte blanche* to do whatever she liked. Or almost *carte blanche*: one suspects that she felt at least some pressure to include Black poets (hence the otherwise unaccountable inclusion of Langston Hughes who wrote most of his major poems during the twenties, and of a still fledgling poet like Rita Dove), a sufficient number of women (I doubt Anne Sexton would otherwise have been included), at least one Beat poet (Allen Ginsberg, who, as a Jewish homosexual, also satisfies the minority requirement), and, in the interest of geographical distribution, one West Coast—Zen—Minimalist poet in the form of Gary Snyder.

Vendler's Introduction, in any case, makes no attempt to justify these inclusions (or their correlative exclusions), opting instead for the large and elegant generalization about "contemporary American poetry." Who, for example, can quarrel with her opening distinction between "the charm of poetry" and its "command," between, that is to say, its linguistic strategies which she rightly calls untranslatable, and its moral and intellectual content, which can be transmitted even in the poetry we read in translation? Vendler sensibly suggests that contemporary poetry is written both for the eye and for the ear, that visual prosody is now a force to reckon with. And she points out, again very sensibly, that poetry is a "self-halting" form of discourse, that "It insists on a spooling, a form of repetition, the

reinscribing of a groove . . . Lyric poetry . . . is profoundly unlinear. It does not advance." (p. 2).

This is very well put, as is the following definition of contemporary American poetic language:

> "It is a language that has assimilated the syncopation of jazz, the stylishness of advertising, the technicalities of psychoanalysis, the simplicities of rural speech, the discourse of the university disciplines, the technology of the engineer, the banalities of journalism" (p. 2).

I find myself nodding in enthusiastic agreement, until I start to think about Vendler's choices and ponder why Louis Zukofsy, who understood, as perhaps has no other American modernist, the "stylishness of advertising," the "technology of the engineer," and the "banalities of journalism," isn't included whereas Howard Nemerov, who writes poems like the following, is:

Snowflakes

Not slowly wrought, nor treasured for their form
In heaven, but by the blind self of the storm
Spun off, each driven individual
Perfected in the moment of his fall.

Can this be regarded as the new American language where "the vernacular thrives and where the rhythms of American life . . . have found a place"? Or, to move over a few pages to the Amy Clampitt selection, where are "the rhythms of American life" in "The Kingfisher," which begins:

In a year the nightingales were said to be so loud
they drowned out slumber, a peafowl strolled screaming
beside the ruined nunnery, through the long evening
of a dazzled pub crawl, the halcyon color, portholed
by those eye-spots' stunning tapestry unsettled
the pastoral nightfall with amazements opening. (p. 122)

Surely Clampitt's is, to paraphrase Eliot on Henry James, a mind so fine no journalistic banality has ever violated it. "A peafowl strolled screaming / beside the ruined nunnery" has a faintly Yeatsian ring, just as "those eye-spots stunning tapestry unsettled" recalls Hopkins, but for the "American idiom," we had better go to that other poem called "The Kingfishers" written by Charles Olson:

What does not change / is the will to change

He woke, fully clothed, in his bed. He
remembered only one thing, the birds, how
when he came in, he had gone around the rooms
and got them back in their cage, the green one first.

The "American idiom," in any case, is described at length in Vendler's Introduction, evidently with an eye to the *Harvard Book*'s potential foreign audience. As such, it might be useful to compare the Vendler version of contemporary American poetry to a recent foreign counterpart, specifically the Gallimard bilingual anthology *Vingt poètes americains*, chosen by two prominent poet-critics Jacques Roubaud and Michel Deguy (Paris, 1980). Roubaud's Introduction begins with the sentence, "What constitutes American literature, in the second half of the twentieth century, is poetry, indeed the explosion of poetry" (my translation). Implicit in this statement is the assumption that poetry inevitably undergoes historical change (in this case, a rupture), an assumption quite at odds with Vendler's evident faith in the timelessness of poetry. "The symbolic strength of poetry," she writes, "consists in giving presence, through linguistic signs, to absent realities, while insisting, by the very brilliance of poetic style, on the linguistic nature of its own being and the illusionistic character of its effects" (p. 17). That, for Vendler, is what poetry always *is*. Roubaud is more pragmatic: his starting point is the year 1960 in which Donald Allen published *The New American Poetry*, and the "explosion" to which he refers comes out of (1) Black Mountain, (2) the San Francisco Renaissance, (3) the New York school, and (4) Objectivism, as these four related movements affected the work of younger poets. The editor further explains that certain poets already well-known in France (Pound, Williams, Stevens, Cummings, O'Hara, Cage) have been omitted, but that he has included one great precursor, Gertrude Stein, because her work is only now having a decisive effect on poets like John Ashbery, Robert Duncan, Jerome Rothenberg, and David Antin (and, writing five years later, Roubaud might have added the "Language" poets, who have been ardent Stein fans, to this group). The resulting list of "twenty American poets," in the order of their presentation is as follows: Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, James Schuyler, Cid Corman, Jack Spicer, Paul Blackburn, Charles Olson, John Ashbery, Larry Eigner, W.S. Merwin, Harry Matthews, Kenneth Koch, Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin, Rosmarie Waldrop, Clayton Eshleman, and Nathaniel Tarn.

There is virtually no common ground between this selection of poets and Vendler's. Only two poets so much as turn up in both the Harvard and the Gallimard anthologies – Ashbery and Merwin. And even here there is an interesting difference, Vendler choosing the later, more "thematic" Ashbery and Merwin poems (e.g., Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," Merwin's "The Asians Dying"), Roubaud and Deguy the more experimental ones like Ashbery's "Sunrise in Suburbia" and Merwin's gnomic epigrams like "The Dream Again."

Does the disparity between the Harvard and the Gallimard anthologies then replicate the old battle between the "academic" (Hall-Pack-Simpson)

and the "radical" (Donald Allen)? Not really. For whereas the Gallimard editors are careful to insist that "This anthology makes no claims to *represent* all of American poetry, whose great richness is just beginning to be understood by us" (see dust jacket; my translation), and whereas they make quite clear that they want to introduce French readers to such historical movements as Objectivism and the New York School, to ethnopoetics and the new "performance" poetry, the Harvard anthology purports, according to the dust jacket, to present us with "the range and power of the contemporary American imagination," with the "distillations of twentieth-century perception, feeling, and thought, and reflections of changing social realities."

It is, in short, the Harvard anthology's claim to canonicity that is problematic. Toward the end of her Introduction, Vendler observes:

> I have preferred to choose fewer poets, and represent them by more poems, rather than have more poets with fewer poems each. In this way, readers can see the poets whole. I have had to leave out many poets whose aims were admirable but whose poems seemed thin (whatever their past historical effect).

The parenthesis in that last sentence is especially revealing. For Vendler, poems neither seem to make nor reflect history; they simply *are*. Thus none of the poems in the anthology are dated, and the capsule biographies in the back of the book are likely to be longer on impressionistic description (Louise Gluck "writes in a veiled and almost disembodied style at once austere and sensuous"; O'Hara is "a poet of invention, irreverence, and colloquial energy") than on factual information. More important: approximately a quarter of the poems are not, by any stretch of the imagination, "contemporary" at all since Vendler begins with "Sunday Morning" (1915), includes a group of Langston Hughes poems written in the twenties as well as a selection from Roethke's "greenhouse poems" of the forties, and quite a few forties poems by Jarrell, Bishop, and Lowell. Indeed, it is worth noting that twelve of Vendler's thirty-five "contemporary" poets are dead.

But none of this seems to matter for the principle of selection used in the *Harvard Book* has less to do with a period of history (the "contemporary") than with the Harvard of Vendler's early mentors, I.A. Richards and Reuben Brower. In his *The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading* (1951), Brower organized his chapters around such topics as "The Speaking Voice (*Dramatic Design*)," "The Aura Around a Bright Clear Centre (*Design in Imagery*)," "Saying One Thing and Meaning Another (*Design in Metaphor and Irony*)," and "The Sinewie Thread (*Key Designs*)." Here is the familiar New Critical demand for organic unity, centering, irony, and indirection, and these are the unstated norms that govern the *Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*.

Key design, the "aura around a bright clear centre"—these are further qualified for Vendler by certain thematic values. "There is no significant [contemporary] poet," she writes, "whose work does not mirror, both formally and in its preoccupations, the absence of the transcendent" (p. 11). And again, "The poets included here write—as the earlier modernists did not—from a Freudian culture" (p. 10), and Lowell is "the first American poet of the family romance" (p. 5). So much for Olson, Duncan, H.D., and Rothenberg, all of them poets who do concern themselves, in one form or another, with "the transcendent"; so much for Zukofsky and Dorn, for Cage and Antin, poets for whom the Freudian family romance is only a small part of the larger socio-political world in which we live.

Indeed, to use her own distinction, Vendler herself is more interested in the "moral command" of poetry than in its "linguistic charm." Valuing the Freudian matrix of "the inner life," Vendler quite logically gives precedence to Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, Merrill, Plath, and Rich, to the Ginsberg of *Kaddish* (notably his only "family romance" poem), and to such younger Freudian poets as Frank Bidart and Louise Gluck. And even such overtly anti-Freudian poets as Ashbery and O'Hara are shadowed by the company they keep in the *Harvard Book*. Framed by countless poems about marriage, infidelity, generational conflict, and psychological trauma, O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter" or Ashbery's "Syringa" undergo an odd process of what Alan C. Golding, in a study of American poetry anthologies (see *Canons*, ed. Robert von Hallberg [University of Chicago Press, 1984]) wittily calls *detoxification*. When, that is to say, we read O'Hara's wonderfully playful, "But me? One day I am thinking of / a color: orange. I write a line / About orange," against the theorem that "The symbolic strength of poetry consists in giving presence, through linguistic signs, to absent realities," we are likely to take O'Hara's "How terrible orange is / and life," as no more than a faint parodic echo of the "late / Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair" of Stevens' "Sunday Morning," the headpiece of the Vendler anthology.

The bright clear centre of the "family romance" does not, in other words, allow much room for "aura," much less for difference. A critic of Helen Vendler's authority has, of course, every right to exercise her preferences, to put together a book of her own personal favorites. I myself find the *Harvard Book* a fascinating index to the sensibility and consciousness of one of our most important critics. But to call such a book *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry* is something else again. What this pretentious title tells us is that our leading publishers, who, in the case of other fields of knowledge, take some pains to establish reasonable guidelines and norms, seem to regard the publishing of poetry as a comparatively trivial pursuit, a more or less marginalized activity, the real action of the moment being elsewhere. We need to find out how this came to be the case and why. Indeed, what is most urgently needed

today is a more adequate discourse about poetry, a discourse that would avoid the bland impressionism that is currently the stock-in-trade of the poetry review. In the absence of a more rigorous poetics, the postmodern, postMarxist, postculture pantheon will soon include another term—POSTPOETRY.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

READING ROGER BASTIDE: SEEKING A POETICS OF CULTURAL INTERPENETRATION

For far too long academies have offered a rigid model of the literary traveller spanning cultures as either A) a White Westerner who remains solidly within the terms of his or her identity reporting on a foreign culture with maximal intellectual and psychological distance or B) a White Westerner who becomes so transformed under the spell of an alien culture that he or she "goes native" and writes out of that transformed subjectivity.

What academic scholarship has traditionally neglected is that condition experienced by so many poets in the past few decades: a recognition of cultural diversities within the psyche so that the voices, objects, languages and rhythms of several cultures co-exist.[1] This means: a writing filled with paradoxes, contradictions, unsolvable problems, a farrago of subjective and objective responses. But how can experiences of many cultures be handled in such a manner that the writing about them doesn't descend into a schizophrenic stew? Or how can such cross-cultural blendings reflect something more than the most superficial surface features of each culture?

The books by the French sociologist Roger Bastide might provide some welcome keys. Bastide is an odd mixture of academic sociologist (long time Sorbonne professor), ethnographer specializing in Afroamerican spiritual cults, historian. He is also a source of inspiration to the archetypal psychologist and poet. Only two of his twenty-eight books are currently available in English: *The African Religions of Brazil* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1978) and *African Civilizations in the New World* (C. Hurst Publishers, London, 1974). The place to begin reading Bastide is *The African Religions of Brazil*. It is a frustratingly confusing book—yet one of the most

1. Victor Turner has some interesting comments about this condition which he identifies as "liminality" or "in-betweenness" in "A Review of Ethnopoetics" in Jerome and Diane Rothenberg's *A Symposium of the Whole*.

astonishingly insightful books on Afroamerican cultures in general and cultural interpenetrations in Brazil in particular. What Bastide has attempted is complicated. On the one hand, he is fascinated by how African cultures have survived the Middle Passage. So his eye is constantly focused on the music and dances associated with various Afro-Brazilian spiritual cults centered in Bahia. As a sociologist he wants to puzzle out the role that various social groups have played in preserving or re-interpreting bits of African cultures. But most movingly, he wants to comprehend – and it is at this juncture that his work becomes most relevant to poets – how cultures dynamically *interpenetrate*. While he documents (like so many other ethnographers of the Afroamerican experience from slavery on) the forms of cultural resistance which enabled Blacks to resist compulsory Christianization, he also tracks the ways in which certain European values and customs were assumed by some Blacks.

Bastide's writings might connect to Jean Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Bollingen Series XXXVIII), a book Robert Kelly was advising young poets to study during the Sixties. The comparison is a bit loose. Seznec takes a broad swatch of Renaissance Philosophy and Art and finds pagan undercurrents swimming just under the painterly surfaces of so much church art. Seznec's study easily translates into archetypal analysis – hence the Bollingen imprint. Bastide's text is more of an unclassifiable sprawl, a Duchampian sculpture of a book with sometimes contradictory aims. The academic sociologist in Bastide desires to sharply reveal the sociological framework within which Afroamerican spiritual cults do their workings. And he is concerned (like Seznec) with cataloging survivals of pre-Christian cultures existing within Christian trappings.

Yet there is another level of *The African Religions of Brazil* which puts it in a different class than Seznec's text. Bastide is one of the few whites who has actually undergone an initiation into an Afro-Brazilian mystery cult with the intention of recording that passage for the White world. He writes as a believer/practitioner, an identity linking him to Maya Deren. It is much to Bastide's credit that he makes no great deal out of his initiation. He mentions it in passing. But the power of his book has everything to do with that fact, and helps explain the unexpected twists and turns in Bastide's text which flit in and out of sounding like Depth Sociology. You'll be reading along and following Bastide's ongoing arguments with Marxist interpreters of spiritual cults and all of a sudden – with a flash of Shango's thunder – you'll sense that Bastide is revealing the rhythms of a spiritual cult as only an insider could. Then at another juncture you can sense that he is exactly on the edge of considering the ramifications of his study on psychology and poetics. After a point I felt the book was about the author's struggle to translate his Afro-Brazilian cult knowledge into Western Social Science terminology, an obviously hopeless task. So Bastide took the next best option: he rendered the phenomenology of how

an individual in a Western cultural matrix tries to entertain a living cultural mosaic.

I sense through Bastide's struggle the awareness that we all could recognize ourselves as the intersection points of many cultural lines. What most involves him is how that culture-spanning experience can be viably lived in everyday life. He identifies the psychological mechanism which permits such transcultural comprehension as the "principle of dissociation" (principe de compure) and provides this example of its working:

> A Brazilian Negro can take part in Brazil's economic and political life, while at the same time remaining a faithful member of various African religious fraternities, and feel no sense of contradiction between the two separate worlds in which he moves.

Translated into the concerns of poetry: how can all layers of a palimpsest be read simultaneously with equal caring attention? What makes possible those rare moments in H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall* where the ancient Greek and contemporary Anglo-American sensibilities so perfectly mesh that both cultural lines modulate in a bright luminescent flicker? Bastide addresses that question of how cultural interpenetrations can be grasped all at once in reading a poem by noting his reading of Césaire:

> Cesaire's poetry expresses such things as the shrinking of global distances and the consequent development of intercontinental contacts – through radio, television, improved sea and air transport, and the resultant accumulation, in the heart of America, of messages and information from the other side of the Atlantic.[2]

Optimistically, Bastide allies himself with the stuff of technology and sees jets and tape recorders bringing about new hybrid forms of transoceanic/Black/White rapprochements. The methods needed to accomplish this new and radically transfigured Middle Passage? Perhaps Bastide in his low-keyed manner offers a path. He wears so many masks: the solidly conservative academic who changes his clothes on weekends to enter ecstatic trance states in African cults, the ethnographer who throws his research notepad to the winds to dance the transcending tribal dance. This is the stuff of Rousseauian romanticism, the cliche of the European bourgeois intellectual "gone native."

Yet the example which Bastide's books offer – and once more Maya Deren's poetically charged ethnography of Haitian voodoo comes to mind

2. Bastide's questionable reading of Césaire's African vision reveals something of Bastide's struggle in embracing the European as well as African cultural strains in a ***balanced*** fashion. Certainly it is fair to assume that Bastide was aware of how advocates of any Pan-African movement (Garveyism, for instance) can so romanticize "Africa" that local cultural creations are seen as wanting.

as a like example – is one in which extremely vigorous scholarship exists side by side with a poetically rich phenomenology of an Afroamerican spiritual cult. The thoroughness and reasonable artfulness of the sociological narrative in *The African Religions of Brazil* encodes the Western/French/Christian/White cultural matrix Bastide is a spokesperson for. What exists concurrently with that level is another level in which Bastide undergoes a mystical initiation into a non-European cult and feels morally obligated to bring the particulars of that spiritual passage back to his base/origin culture. He makes that passage in which the White Christian takes on Blackness to the greatest degree possible with a remarkable lack of ego involvement. Only in the closing pages of his modestly constructed *African Civilizations in the New World* does he begin to drop hints about what daimons/demons in his psyche led him into the smoky *candomblés* of Bahia:

> That spiritual void which the city creates at the heart of each human individual is resented, naturally, just as much by the European as by the Negro. As a result, the European turns increasingly to Africa or Black America for the satisfaction of those vital needs which industrial society can no longer satisfy.

Translate "vital needs" as sexuality. Bastide continues:

> Yet while the city cultivates eroticism, it also destroys its potential by reducing the sexual relationship to a simple animal act, and thus doing away with the long preliminary period of courtship which formerly led up to it. As a result, the orgasm has lost its truly liberating function. Dances such as the tango or samba constitute an attempt to reintroduce these old approaches, to make the road of desire long and difficult once more, to create a new swing away from pure eroticism, which is always disillusioning, towards true passion.

The samba and tango grew out of the ritualized dance movements of the Afroamerican cults. And it is not far-fetched to speculate that much of American jazz found a spawning ground there as well as blues, rock and reggae. Imagination can move us to consider how Eros has found a home in the popular dance steps associated with each musical style, those patterns "making the road of desire long." And what can be said about American poetries echoing such rhythms? We have come light years from theories like Norman Mailer's "White Negro" into a realm where discourse in depth can be created as a White psychic traveller witnesses his/her Whiteness dissolve into Blackness only to witness the blood pulse finally flood consciousness with a Red cosmos. Eros paints with this traditional Western African/European alchemical palette, transforming those pure color swirls into sharply drawn figures borrowed from the collective memory banks of Africa and Europe. A poetics can be developed in this time in/formed by ancestors competing to be heard, multi-cultural forms

can be forged, the road of desire can be stretched, a poem a dancing ground where imaginal figures move into that abandon where a liberating orgasm is invited, its energies to clarify and heal. But the passage is never as simple as "incorporating" the image-repertoires of alien cultures into new styles of writing. It is a task of learning a daily rhythm incorporating the imperatives of two cultures at once, and keeping thought and feeling functions fully alive and responsive when faced with often contradictory cultural demands. Bastide should be honored for how courageously he maintained the capacity to move along a continuum between cultural polarities not losing his head or heart or genitals in transit.

NORMAN WEINSTEIN

NOTE: For a sense of what Bastide heard in the Afro-Brazilian cults he studied and participated in, listen to *Folk Music of Brazil: Afro-Bahian Religious Songs*, U.S. Library of Congress Recording AFS L13, field recorded by cultural anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovitz. A more contemporary recording of the same is *Afro-Brazilian Religious Music* (Lyrichord Records 7315).

ORGAN

King of instruments, my foot. Why did composers of music for the organ base their sublime plan on the notion that each of us, in or out of radio land, resides in one of the cathedrals that dignify the western territories? Even if not many of us do, what pretension, to compose a music like that. Fat music, awash with adjectives. Numerous as laundry items rushing from a hospital, the surge of it engulfs nave and choir from altarpiece to tympanum. Saturation completed, it plugs every orifice of her body, every interior cranny of the mother of God.

In my nook, even if it were to be plucked off its axis and set down in the tiniest alcove of a baby church, with me prostrate there, hearkening, a baby man, such vast sonorities cranked up by beery bellows-pumpers—frantic, poor devils, they capered out of bed and had not a bite for breakfast—or activiated by the nervous acolyte Electricity, could not but pulverize my perception of God and his mother, if ever he had one.

A little boy crosses a village green after matins. Having heard three hymns and a voluntary embroidered on the harmonium by a virgin, whose eyes, he can tell, are bright, he can sense underfoot the fragrance of village grass. I crave blessings that come from less and less.

Meanwhile the organist's feet pounce on the wooden pedals. Pliantly, too, they brush them. Supple as those of a tango dancer his calves,

left and right, ripple across the pedals, which resemble the skeleton of a mastodon rolled flat into fossilizing mud, or else the hull-ribbing of an excavated galleon. Meanwhile, look through his flannel trouser legs, ebon hairs sprout from him; against the white cheddar of his organist flesh, to show what a born organist he is, they stand out as distinctly as do sharps and flats against the rattling dentures, which incessantly chomp, three or four tiers of them. Were it not for the stickers and trackers and backfalls coupling the keys with the valves, the staggering ingenuity of the mechanism his feet and fingers operate, you might think he was a buzzard, perched there above the wind trunk, for his body sways, his head and shoulders turn, as if to sniff the breeze for carrion.

Abetted by the bellows his fists punish those dentures, ribs, me. What battles did the composer dream he was fighting, generalbassissimo of a pipe army storming Leipzig or Liverpool, Salt Lake City or Chartres? What Thalben Balls and E. Power Biggses have navigated their fleet of cosmic dreadnoughts, fit only to fill whole Pacifics, manned by humungous grunting pirates, into my nook, their salvos burst the seams of its gossamer design! A hurricane has extinguished my strawberry nightlight. Some awful error, since magnitude is not the sole signature of divinity, crushes my familiar cricket, which was a joy till now, seldom palpable, often whistling in my ear. Who's to blame?

Vainglorious as American foreign policy since 1898, the organ assumes that the rest of the world is vacant, or had better be. The rest of the world, an unformed receptable, my nook, my shattered nook. Yet it had been animated by several venerable hayseeds, champions all, black or brown, hobnobbing of this or that, local concerns, good and bad old times. Into it falls a phosphorescent mass, the superfruit of weapon contracts. Vast brown product, flies called promises buzz around it, it is streaked with blood, such are the infirmities that swell, back home, the consumer price index. Horror, in that organ and of it. Stop tapping them teeth! Retract from them pedals, dear organist, your rubber feet! Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

A FEW DON'TS FOR CHINESE POETS

It is one of the neater symmetries of modernism: the East discovering in the West what the West has found in the East. Ezra Pound, in 1913, shortly after receiving the Fenollosa manuscripts of Chinese poetry, writes "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," surely the most influential manifesto in English in this century. Published in *Poetry* that year, it is enthusiastically read

by a young Chinese poet named Hu Shi, who is studying in the United States. Hu returns to China and, in 1917, publishes his "Tentative Proposals for the improvement of Literature" which quickly becomes known as the "Eight Don'ts." ("Write with substance . . . Don't imitate the ancients . . . Emphasize grammar . . . Reject melancholy . . . Eliminate old cliches . . . Don't use allusions . . . Don't use couplets and parallelisms . . . Don't avoid popular expressions or popular forms . . .") The following year Hu Shi waves the banner of the new in a series of even more Poundian formulations ("Speak only if you have something to say . . . Say what you have to say, and say it as it is said . . . Speak your own language, not the language of others . . . Speak the language of your own time.") These manifestoes set off a literary revolution, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which runs parallel to the political fervors of the moment: fierce nationalism and progressiveness, the rejection of traditional and (ironically) foreign models, and a rallying to replace *wen yan* (classical literary writing) with *bai hua* (popular speech).

Movements toward "real speech" face a perennial dilemma: To write in real speech one must stay at home and hear the language; yet real speech movements—assertions of one's own collective language—arise from cultural inferiority complexes, whether national or social; and the (imagined) culturally inferior usually feel compelled to go abroad (or into the social establishment) to find validation for their work, thereby uprooting themselves from the very ground they've staked out.

The best novels of the so-called Latin American "boom"—a celebration of Latin American matter and speech—were written at home. The novelists then, almost all of them, went abroad in search of reputation, losing touch with their language and suffering a serious decline. Latin American poets, on the other hand, have tended to do their best work abroad, writing in a literary or highly idiosyncratic language. *Residence on Earth*, *Altazor*, the later poems of Vallejo, *Blanco*, all assume an international voice—the other way out from self-perceived second-class citizenship. Latin American poetry has never had an important real speech movement, and a poet like Williams, compared to exiles like Pound or Eliot, has remained of little interest there. (Pound could declare, in the preface to the 1915 Imagist anthology, that the first "essential of all great poetry" is "to use the language of common speech," but his dictum hardly applies to the *Cantos*. And, as might be expected, Eliot—the writer with the least colloquial, least idiosyncratic language—was the North American who most quickly achieved international recognition.)

In China, the May Fourth Movement turned out to be a success for fiction and a failure for poetry. The novel, which the Chinese always considered to be a secondary genre, was fertilized by real speech, and triumphed over its inferiority by blossoming into national respectability. Poetry, however, the highest art form in China, had nowhere to go for

validation (the West was just beginning to translate the nearly 3000 years of Chinese poetry). It had to resort to tradition for its authority. Even Mao Zedong, who began writing poetry in 1922, wrote nearly all of his poems in the classical language.

Much of what Hu Shi discovered in Pound he might have found closer in place but further in time—in, for example, the work of the poet-critic Yuan Haowen (1190–1257). Yuan was a poet-critic in the true sense: that is, he wrote most of his criticism in verse form—a genre which seems to have dropped out of world literature. He wrote during the obscure and short-lived Jin Dynasty (1114–1234), which he saw fall to the Mongol invaders, whom he refused to serve. He is best known for a series of thirty "Poems on Poetry," some scattered poems on the fall of the dynasty, prefaces to collections by Du Fu and Su Dongpo, and his anthology of Jin poetry, the function of which he described in a moving poem:

> In times of peace, there's no need for unofficial recorders;
> But since the disaster, everything has been destroyed, even the official histories.
> Thanks to heaven, a manuscript of the century's work has been preserved;
> I take it to the lonely hills to read with stifled tears.*

Yuan's critical admonitions—in favor of "sincerity" and colloquial speech, against ornamentation and slavish imitation of the ancients—had no immediate impact. He wrote, after all, during one of the collapses of the Empire, and—refreshingly, for a critic—his most important critical work, the "Poems on Poetry," were written for his own illumination, and were not circulated.

But he was never obscure, and earlier in this century the great scholar Kojiro Yoshikawa even declared that Yuan was a greater poet than his Song Dynasty near-contemporaries, Lu Yu and Su Dongpo. This is hard to believe, but much of what Yuan wrote is still worth reading:

> Write verse the way you speak! What need to display one's talent?
>
> . . . fashionable adornment,
> rouge and tint, struggle uselessly to gain affection.
>
> Poetic "sounds and pictures of the mind" are generally untrue;
> You can rarely know a man from his writings.
>
> Naturally inspired is the line where the eye gives shape to the mind.

*The translations of Yuan are adapted from John Timothy Wixted's monograph *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism of Yuan Hao-wen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

Without sincerity there is nothing. Unless one is sincere, there is nothing by which to guide one's words, and the heart and the mouth separate into two objects. One becomes estranged from the world and one's words grow apart from things, becoming vaguer with distance. Coming from afar, one's words, though they be heard, will be like spring breezes blowing past the ears of a horse.

To struggle relentlessly writing poetry greys the hair
Don't seek inspiration in old papers . . .

. . . to get away from the ordinary and the hackneyed, to wash clean hazy obscurities, to range freely over the realm of one's potential as if smashing an enemy formation or capturing monsters, to explicate what is hidden, to encompass past and present, to vie with creation itself – this is skill. Dull-witted obscurity, superficial rashness, indulgent license, trumped-up trivialities, rotten cliches – these are faults.

Tang Geng said: When poetic discipline suffers from strictness, it approaches meanness.

Looking at poetry after Du Fu: How can the later generations, which consider poetry to be a specialized subject, hope to emulate the ancients when they don't treat it as a life-and-death matter?

Students of the esoteric say that the Way does not reside in words, and yet they cannot get away from words. Poetry, though not removed from language, does not reside in it.

A text is written character by character;
It should be read character by character,
Until its language becomes like family.

And Yuan himself wrote a "Few Don'ts" for Chinese poets. Allowing for some cultural translation, they are still apt:

Don't be unhappy.
Don't be slick.
Don't be fiercely sharp.
Don't be pointedly disagreeable.
Don't be deviously incriminating.
Don't be wishy-washy.
Don't draw far-fetched conclusions.
Don't curry favor.
Don't practice self-advertisement.
Don't wear camouflage.
Don't indulge in sophistries.
Don't act as if you're some great sage.
Don't be as jealous as a concubine.

Don't be a malicious feuder.
Don't be a rabble-rousing rumor-monger.
Don't be a blind face-reader.
Don't be a drunk abusive condemned criminal.
Don't be a wiseguy doing "favors" that cost nothing.
Don't be a stubborn old farmer.
Don't be a mercilessly unrelenting prosecutor.
Don't be one who sells another's goods.
Don't be a singer in the market whining about ill treatment.
Don't be a *pipa* player rhyming phrases about the soul.
Don't be a village schoolmaster with a how-to-write book.
Don't be a sand-counting monk getting lost in semantics.
Don't be an exorcist slinging taboo words.
Don't act as if you're the only person in the universe or the only one in the history of time.
Don't get unruffled by petty offenses.
Say nothing that isn't true.

At the end of his life, immersed in Chan Buddhism, he wrote a series of four poems titled "On Being Called to Write." Here are two of them:

In a dream, startled that my hair had turned white,
I wrote a poem as I would speak it, and yet it was divine.
In heaven, the price of poetry has gone up:
For even one good stanza, one has to pay with one's youth.

Enlightenment unfolding, the ultimate origin revealed,
Regardless of strange and heterodox texts.
What does a poet know of the mechanism that makes all things work?
To find and use a single key is more than enough.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

AUTOPOIESIS AND COGNITION: THE REALIZATION OF THE LIVING, Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume 42, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980, 141 pp.
AMERICAN POETRY AND CULTURE, 1945-1980, Robert von Hallberg, Harvard University Press, 1985, 276 pp.

1)

During the past decade or more the epistemological paradigm which might be called *panlogism* has become the orthodoxy. After the discovery of

the DNA codes and the appearance of the computer as the apparent solution to the problems of a post-industrial economy, suddenly *everything* seen as "code." Neural paths, economies, psyches, cultures, and literatures were understood as linguistic, the flow and exchange of information. We came to understand that the content of information is information, so objects – people, interstate highways, shopping malls, poems, etc. – are potentially digitalized and read out in flows of binary bits or their higher level equivalents, such as COBOL or English. Thus, Charles Bernstein, "It is through language that we experience the world, indeed through language that meaning comes into the world and into being. As persons, we are born into language and world; they exist before us and after us. . . . I do not suggest that there is nothing beyond, or outside of, human language, but that there is meaning only in terms of language, that the givenness of language is the givenness of the world." Similarly, Barrett Watten writes: "Language is open-ended; like Wittgenstein's notion of the infinity, it is not a quantity but a repeated operation. The rules for the construction of language are languages. . . . The scale of language can only increase; it is due to this fact that language, as a nonquantifiable entity, denies closure." We could find similar ideas being expressed in nearly every field: there is a popular book, of the kind intended to sum up the current zeitgeist, entitled *Grammatical Man*. It is our current cliche, as in the 1950's we spoke of "the age of anxiety."

Although Wittgenstein, who is frequently taken as prime evidence of grammatical man, may be read in another sense, we have lacked a rigorous statement of an alternative position. Or I should say that the alternative position which has been available to us has failed to find the currency it deserves. *Autopoiesis and Cognition* by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela is a book of the first importance – a book of the order of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and *Process and Reality*. That Maturana and Varela are cybernetic biologists, thus, workers in one of the fields most directly responsible for the extension of the information metaphor into all phases of life, perhaps gives the book even greater relevance. It consists of two essays, "Biology of Cognition," by Maturana alone, which was first published in 1970, and "Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living," the collaboration, which was first established in 1973. The book was published in the Boston Philosophy of Science series in 1980. Thus it is material which belongs to the Viet Nam era – a measure of current cultural lag or suspended animation. These works cannot be easily summarized: they are formal statements, as tightly argued as the *Tractatus*. They are, as Maturana notes in his introduction, cosmologies. Although Maturana's and Varela's methods involve formal logical systems, not mythologies, the relationship of their work to contemporary culture might be justly compared with Hesiod's *Theogony* to the ancient Greek.

They ask this question: "What is proper to living systems that had its origin when they originated, and has remained invariant since then in the succession of their generations?" One might respond to this question with a list of characteristics of living systems—"reproduction, heredity, growth, irritability, and so on"—but it would be necessary to know the answer beforehand in order to know when the list is complete. Maturana and Varela define living systems in terms of autopoiesis, literally the self-creating unity of the organism. The art of Maturana and Varela is to manifest the essential, unspeakable nature of living systems clearly and rigorously. That is, they are successful in the project which contemporary poetics has frequently despaired of. The following passage should make the relevance of their argument apparent. Of his work, Maturana claims, rightly I believe, that it is only after distinguishing "between what pertains to the domain of the observer, and what pertains to the domain of the organism, and through carrying to their ultimate consequences the implications of the circular self-referring organization of the living systems . . . [that] the functional complexity of the living and linguistically interacting system can be properly grasped without its being concealed through such magic words as consciousness, symbolization, or information." He adds, "Living systems in general, and their nervous system in particular, are not made to handle a medium, although it has been through the evolution of their handling of their medium that they become what they are, such that we can say what we can say about them."

I will not try to spell out the political implications of the argument in detail. Suffice it to say that it is an elegant defense of the integrity of every cosmic component; as such, it is opposed both to right- and left-wing totalitarianism. It continues the battle of Olson's Enyalion against "the Guards of Tartaros/Finks of the bosses."

> Enyalion
> is in the service of the law of the proportions
> of his own body Enyalion.

2)

I am only half inclined to review Robert von Hallberg's *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980.* For reasons which I will make clear, however, it exemplifies our need for Maturana's and Varela's testimony.

Professor von Hallberg is better informed than most of the critics who have attempted surveys of contemporary American poetry, and he is alone among academic critics to recognize that the relationship of poetry to the culture at large has radically changed. He begins, "Several friends have admitted to me that, however firmly literature or other arts may bear on their lives, the poetry of their contemporaries is almost entirely unknown

to them," and he thoughtfully addresses the dilemma of poets without an audience. His investigations into publication figures for volumes of poetry, on which he spends several useful pages, are undoubtedly the best thing in the book. It is not however a book addressed to the readers of *Sulfur*. As a book by a professor at the University of Chicago and published by Harvard University Press, I review it as a symptom of a moribund culture.

To be sure, as with many other academic books, I wonder to whom it *is* addressed. Presumably to people like von Hallberg's friends who do not read poetry: its argument, never quite explicitly stated, seems to be poetry is once again safe for nice people, who like to go to shopping malls, barbecue in the backyard, and vote for Ronald Reagan. (Of course, if they will not read poetry it is even less likely that they will read books *about* poetry.) His last chapter is entitled "Conclusion: Suburbs." As it introduces a completely new subject, we are to understand both that it is the end of the book and that suburbism is the conclusion of that movement which began with an increase of sophistication after World War II and ran to riot in the 1960's. I will let Professor von Hallberg speak for himself:

> The poetry I admire from this period is fairly spoken of as one of accommodation rather than opposition. In the last decade, several important poets have tried in particular to accommodate the middle and lower-middle classes resident in the suburbs and represented through television, movies, and tabloids. In part this effort has been made in a spirit of concession to an audience, though the actual audience for poetry is suburban only insofar as college and university towns are suburban. Of course most American academic communities are by policy suburban, deliberately at no great remove from central social institutions. To that extent, poets who have turned to suburbs for subject matter are honestly engaging experiences that are indeed familiar, even to readers of poetry, and rather little explored by poets.

Rather little explored indeed, even by its inhabitants, who are infrequently explorers.

Professor Helen Vendler reviewed von Hallberg's book, along with collections of essays by Robert Haas and Dave Smith (*NYRB*, Nov. 7, 1985), taking the occasion to call for a more theoretical reading of contemporary American poetry. The problem, which she does not recognize, however, is that the bulk of the poetry which comes to the public attention has no theoretical content. In asking Haas and Smith for theory, she is asking for a theory of cocktail-party chatter, which might be interesting but would not constitute a poetics. Personal style is not the stuff of theory: some people wear double-knit and some wear denim; when you buy your outfit, they give you a manner of speaking, a diction, a set of habitual images, and a selection of poets who share the style. Statistically, this is not a significant cultural phenomenon. Most people forego the poets who

match their socks.

As subjects of sociocultural study, people interested in poetry might be included in a group with other obsessive practitioners of unusual style; this would include collectors of barbed-wire and carnival glass, aficionados of chile cook-offs, amateur magicians and so on. The fact is that the poetry of Robert Haas and Dave Smith has no more theoretical content than they exhibit in their appreciations of other poets, and this is true of most, if not all of the poets, who are regularly offered to the academic audience. Their work proposes senses of the world that would have been completely familiar to Coleridge, whose theory was an account of his and Wordsworth's attempt to assimilate the poetry of the seventeenth century. We have no reason to be explicit about this reflex: it is in everyone's bones, whether they read poetry or not. It is our sentimentality: almost everyone wears some Miltonic perfume behind the ear.

In comparison to Haas and Smith, the interesting case is von Hallberg, who mixes poets who might provide evidence for a theory—Creeley, Ashbery, and Dorn—with poets who know their poems are poems only because they look like poems which are published in the *New Yorker* and *Poetry*—Van Duyn and McMichaels. The theory which might embrace this domain of evidence, which is hopelessly broad, is certain to be trivial. If we did have a theory of von Hallberg's canonical poetry, what might his "poetry" mean in the context of *Autopoiesis and Cognition*? So, three quick points for an ending:

1) Professor von Hallberg's second chapter is "Robert Creeley and John Ashbery: Systems." (It is not clear how these poets or Edward Dorn, to whom he devotes a chapter, fit in with his suburban tastes). In this chapter, he casually applies some casual knowledge of cybernetics to poetry. It is, after all, only a metaphor, not to be taken seriously. He concludes "That Norbert Wiener's methods of computing variations in the flights of bomber planes should have any bearing on these entirely traditional subjects of poetry is one of the odd quirks of recent literary history. . . ."

It is neither completely true nor quirky, if it were: Wiener's method of analyzing systems applies to anything whatsoever, the variations of love affairs as much as the flights of bomber planes. The point von Hallberg hopes to prove with this sneaky rhetorical turn is that these avant-garde poets are morally compromised, just like everyone else in the suburbs. The military-industrial complex has *everyone* under its thumb. We should understand our guilt as a badge of our success.

2) Professor von Hallberg is intent upon discovering "Centrist poets, [who] must live with their complicity, fully aware that moments of shame go along with access to the cultural authority of a centralized culture." In one sense, this point of view is directly opposed to Barrett Watten's "peripheralist" poetry: "If individuals have made symptomatic adjustments (or exceptions) to the world as it is by means of a set of relations we might

call a 'language,' the question is how to make these 'languages' available to a larger social scale." Maturana and Varela, however, provide a perspective from which it is clear that both of these positions understand cultural production as essentially invasive. Thus, Watten tells us, ". . . languages should be characterized in terms of their forms, the mechanisms by which they are constituted and by which they reproduce their conceptual order in individuals. . . ." The metaphor here must be of language as succubi "reproducing their conceptual order" or, in more contemporary terms, language as a selfish cultural gene which uses individuals as the material for their realization and transmission. It is this understanding of person-begetting cultural artifacts that Watten shares with von Hallberg and other Arnoldian academics.

3) To Charles Olson, the integrity of the human organism is the only origin and grounds of poetry. Attempts to appropriate the organism, on behalf of *anything*, no matter how high-minded, is evil. The objections to advertising in the early *Maximus* is not mere bohemian complaint; it establishes minimal conditions for the possibility of poetry:

> colored pictures
> of all things to eat: dirty
> postcards
> And words, words, words
> all over everything
> No eyes or ears left
> to do their own doings . . .

In relation to this passage, Professor von Hallberg notes: Robert Pinsky "can write, as Olson could not, with flexibility of attitude, a fair-mindedness that one cannot expect from avant-gardists like Olson." He underwrites a peculiar invention of the Reagan era, which might be called "the tyranny of manners." It is now impolite to object to the appropriation of one's organic being.

Olson did not think of himself as avant-garde; he was, he said, Pleistocene. Maturana and Varela offer us perhaps the most direct access to the thought of pleistocene integrity.

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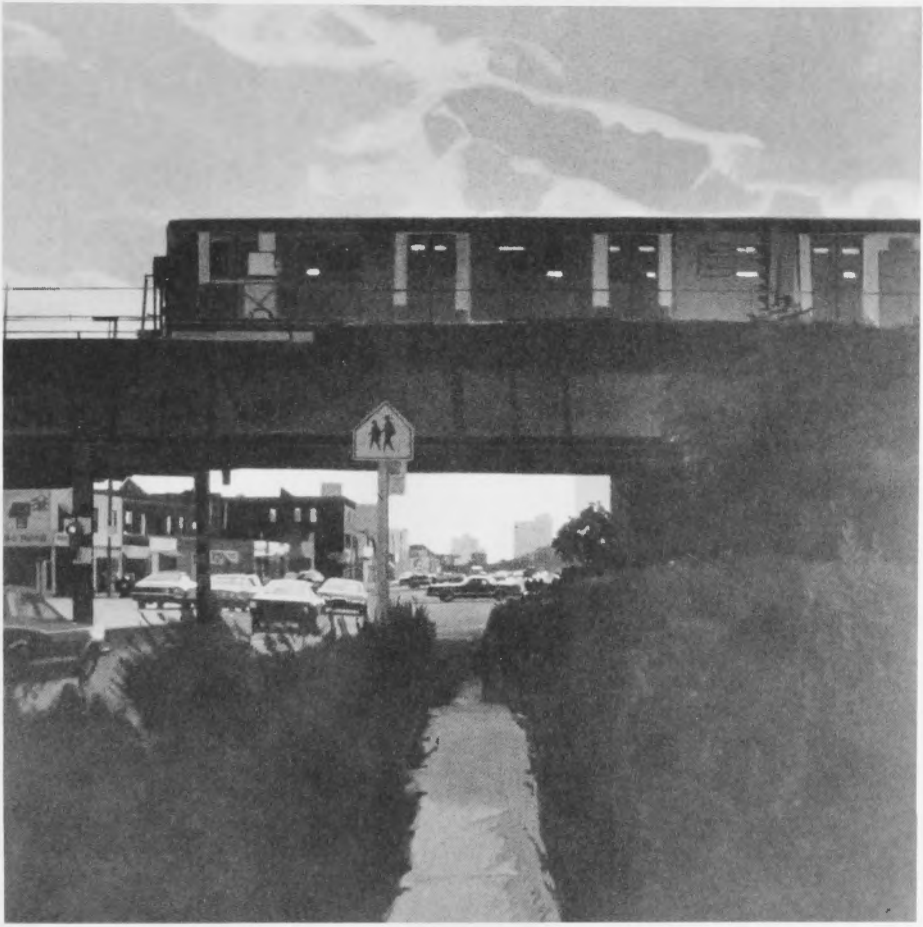

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